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DECEMBER 2015

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## MODERN fishing

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Back issues call 1800 801 647

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Email: circulation@emgroup.com.au

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#### PUBLISHED BY

Published by EMG Express Media Group a division of Express Publications Pty Limited ACN 057 807 904 2 Stanley Street NSW 2128 Australia ph (02) 9741 3800 fax (02) 9748 1956, under licence from General Newspapers Pty Limited ABN 49 000 117 322, Double Bay Newspapers Pty Limited ABN 22 000 237 598 and Suburban Publications Pty Limited ABN 44 008 629 767. All rights reserved.

#### DISTRIBUTED BY

##### Network Services

66-68 Goulburn St Sydney NSW 2000

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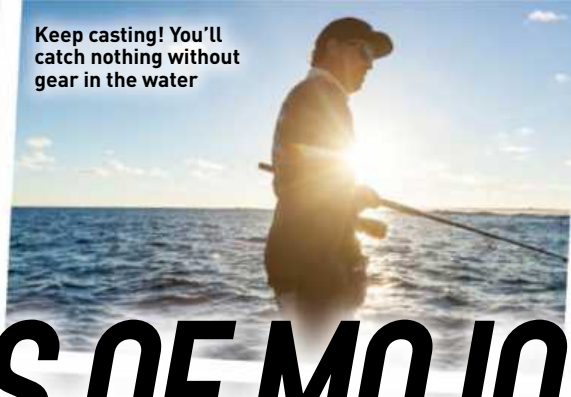
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# MASTERS OF MOJO

**Why do some people believe that others have acquired some form of fishing 'mojo'?**

**G**eez there's some great fishing being done of late! Keeping an eye on social media is a top way to keep up with what's been going on in the fishing world and I can't help but get a little envious of some of the blokes that have been posting up some of these incredible catches! Sure I get out on the water plenty myself and have been finding some great fish too but I'm a slave to the desk for a good portion of my time (not that I'd have it any other way). There are some guys out there though that seem to catch 90% of the good fish and I've noticed quite often how people comment on some of their images stating that they have the "mojo" or, "I wish I could catch fish like that".

It's an interesting concept mojo – to believe that someone has an automatic advantage over

they're after and how they behave and the results are speaking for themselves. Wishes don't get fishes, fishing gets fishes! Believe me, those guys have fishless days just like anyone else. In fact they have more because they fish more, you just don't hear about them.

While I'm yet to be accused of having any kind of mojo, I have noticed a marked improvement in my own fishing of late. There have been hundreds of things that have helped but only a few that really stand out. I used to fish in the morning or the afternoon, simply because these were the 'prime times' and I would rarely fish for more than a few hours. I loved going to sea and fishing the reefs but I would often pull the pin by 9am because there were no fish taking my 'usual offerings' on my 'usual reefs'. These days, nine times out of ten

**'The fact is, these guys fish more, they fish harder and they pay better attention to the fish they're after'**

everyone else due to some higher power willing the fish their way is pretty strange in my book. To think this, that no matter what you do in your fishing activities that you'll never catch as many fish as those guys that seem so prolific on social media, is really capping your belief in your own abilities and is in a way, down playing their success by suggesting that it's not deserved and that it's just luck on their side.

The fact is, these guys fish more, they fish harder and they pay better attention to the fish

my fishing consists of a full day on the water. Two 'prime times', multiple tides to work over and if I'm not seeing results, I'll change tactics and if that doesn't work, I'll move. If I don't know where to move to, I'll find a new spot by thinking laterally about the fish I'm after. I've read too many expert pieces on just about every fish there is to allow myself to have any sort of excuse to just pack it in.

Naturally, if you fish more you will catch more – that's a given but by being on the water more often, you're able to (whether it be by coincidence, skill or a bit of both) come across those magic bite periods that happen all too rarely and if you're smart about it, you'll make a mental or even better, physical note of why it happened so you can be back on the water when all those stars align in the hopes that it will all happen again. If it doesn't happen again, be thankful that you're on the water doing what you love and aim to at least take something constructive out of every session. If you can't draw at least one positive thing out of each session, you'll probably never attain the kind of level that your fishing idols are at because they love what they do, even on the hard days!

My conclusion – fishing mojo is a cop out for not doing the hard yards. A massive credit goes out to the guys that do!

It doesn't hurt to do a bit of overtime when the payoff is a fish of your dreams!



*Ads*





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## DRIVEN BY PASSION

**What's it take to make it in the fishing industry? Hard work and a drive to achieve results**

It seems that everyone wants my lifestyle at the moment. For some reason in the last few months everyone has been asking me through social media, email and personally about how they can have a job like mine. There is no doubt I have the best job in the world, what other job allows you to go fishing and get paid for it? Believe me I am fully aware of it but on the same note, it's anything but the cruisy lifestyle that everyone thinks it is. In fact it is downright, bloody hard work at times to be honest with you.

I have to shoot images for the papers and magazines every day when I'm on the water and now there is the added weight of producing my new fishing show. The latter means serious pressure because if I don't get it right every time then there is some serious money at stake....my money! I don't have the luxury of a normal job where you get paid irrespective of what happens, instead I go hungry.

it may sound like I'm whining but I'm not, I'm doing this for the benefit of anyone out there who would like to walk a similar path to me. I would like them to know that it's tough, it's demanding on you and your family, but it's all worth the effort. Just do it the right way, not the quick way!

So the question is, how do you get a job like mine? The answer is easy; it's not a degree or a diploma, instead it's all about the passion. To take an idea and turn it into reality takes a whole lot of passion. Passion drives success and everyone has a passion for something, the key is discovering yours. For me I knew from an early age I was going to fish and hell or high water I was going to make it work.

I started out as a sales assistant at the Compleat Angler before kicking off my career as a photojournalist. I started taking photos and writing about my adventures. It was a long hard road before I got any sort of regular income from fishing, there is no denying it but I'm


**"If you want a job like mine, do it for the love — not for the fame or the money"**

There are the constant predawn starts, getting smashed at sea, racing up and down the coast chasing the bite, gear failures and of course those fish-less days are all part of the daily routine. It's mentally and physically draining at times, but I love it, so in my view I never have to work a day in my life but I have to work hard to have this life. You have to take the good with the bad, but when it all comes together you're on a high like no other and that is what I love about it. Now,

proud of the fact that I am able to now call my passion a full-time job.

I've experienced an influx of people lately asking me how to get sponsored and how to get famous for fishing. Social media seems to have created this monster and I'm not afraid to make the call that there are a lot of people out there with a large following who wouldn't know the tip from the butt of their rod. They're after instant gratification and hell, some are even buying a following. Other guys have cropped up relatively quickly and have developed a large following too, but instead of buying likes or followers, they're gaining a reputation for their efforts. They fish hard and catch plenty of fish, they expand their contacts through social media and they pass a lot of their knowledge on to other guys on there. These are the guys to watch out for, they are letting their fishing tell the tale instead of putting their hand out for something they don't deserve. Remember, you are only as good as the last fish you caught!

However, if you want the best lifestyle on earth and are prepared to work purely for the passion because you love it then you will succeed!

Believe me, you never get tired of it, in fact the more I work the more I love it, it's all consuming and something that you can never master, only consistently improve. Today I am still just as passionate as the day I started, in fact I think I am even more excited about fishing and filming these days. In fact, I think I'll go right now! 

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# CATCH OF THE MONTH

**Congratulations to the winner of our Catch of the Month competition! Email your entries to the Modern Fishing team at [editorial@modernfishing.com.au](mailto:editorial@modernfishing.com.au) for your chance to win next month**

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Make sure you include a high-resolution photo and a bit of information about yourself and your catch. The winner of Catch of the Month will be decided by the Modern Fishing team on not only the quality of the catch, but the story behind it too!

**LOWRANCE**



**WINNER!**

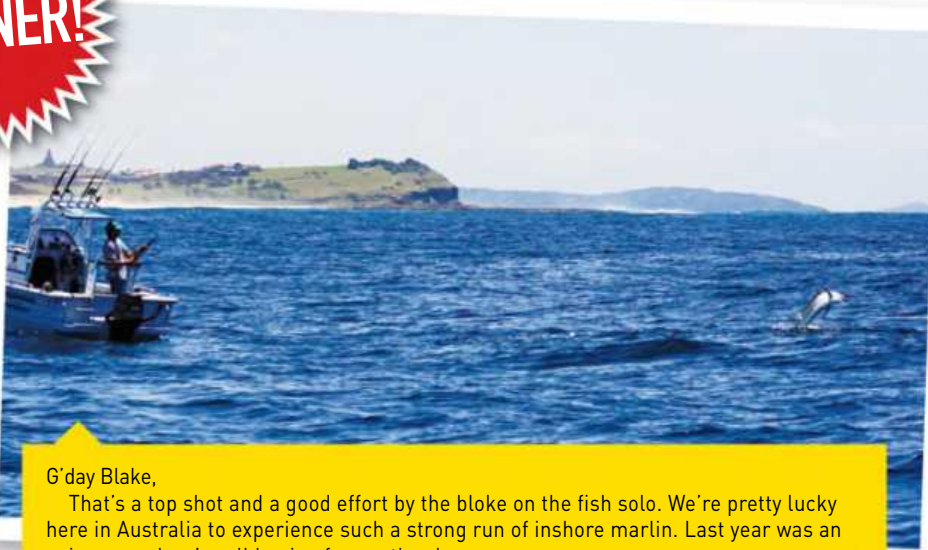
## MARLIN MEMORIES

Hi guys,

I was just getting all the gear ready for another season of little black marlin and got to reminiscing on some old photos. I thought you might like to check out this shot I snapped of a guy, hooked up solo only a few hundred metres off the beach on the north coast. They were thick that day with just about every boat on the water hooking into at least one fish.

It sounds like there's a few showing up in the north so we're really hoping for another good year!

**Cheers,  
Blake**



G'day Blake,

That's a top shot and a good effort by the bloke on the fish solo. We're pretty lucky here in Australia to experience such a strong run of inshore marlin. Last year was an epic run and we're all hoping for another bumper season.

Cheers for dropping us a line mate and sharing this awesome image with Australia. For your photographic efforts, we reckon you're a deserving winner of this month's top prize! Keep an eye on the letter box as we'll be sending you out a brand new Lowrance Mark 4 depth sounder. Congrats mate!

**MF Team**



## BACK ON THE BASS

G'day,

My name's Cody and I'm a big fan of the magazine. I've been fishing mostly in the salt water for years and love all the estuary species like flatties, bream and jewies but I've recently gotten into bass fishing and since the rivers have just opened back up I've been getting some good fish. I thought I'd share this little shot I took of releasing a fish that cracked 42cm the other day after a big hike into a new spot. It was the first time I've fished the place and I ended up with four bass and this was the biggest. I reckon there'll be bigger fish in there too!

Keep up the good work!

**Cody**

Hi Cody,

Thanks for sharing your shot buddy. How good are bass! It's always good to have your efforts of finding a new spot pay off in the form of some quality wild fish. Things like Google Earth are really helping fishos find those little honey holes that would have previously gone un-fished.

We hope you get stuck into plenty more at Spot X mate and keep sending us the cracking shots!

**MF Team**

# A NEW FRIEND



Hi Modern Fishing,

Check out this shot of a little blue salmon I got while I was out fishing the other day. I was throwing a few lures around and getting some small trevors and other things when this salmon came swimming right up to my feet. He stayed around the rocks I was fishing on for about ten minutes and I threw a bunch of different lures at him but he didn't seem interested in eating. I think he just wanted to make a new friend! It was a cool experience even though I didn't catch him.

Josh

G'day Josh,

Great shot mate. Cheers for sending us your story on your new buddy. It certainly sounds like strange behaviour! That's the beauty of fishing, you get to experience nature at its finest... and its weirdest!

MF Team

## DAD'S DEBATE

G'day guys,

The old man and I fished the top end for a month recently and had an absolute ball! We fished for everything from saratoga and barra in the fresh to queens, mackerel and trevally offshore and while we agreed that the fishing was insane, there was one thing we couldn't agree on. We caught heaps of trevally that Dad was calling for GT's and most of the other blokes up there were as well but some reckon they're brassy trevally. I reckon they're on the money as true GT's live on the outer reefs, right?

Can you guys shed some light on the fish in the photos I sent through and help me prove the old boy wrong?

Tim

Hi Tim,

We reckon you'd be right on the fish in the photos. This is a brassy trevally and these are pretty commonly mistaken for GT's in the north of the country. They look very similar but don't grow to anywhere near the size of a true GT though. True GT's do however get caught in the top end in amongst brassy trevally so there's every chance you may have caught both. Definitely a brassy in the photo though and it looks like he's engulfed that Halco!

Cheers for letting us settle the dispute mate!

MF Team







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# LURE LAW







## 100 tips for using lures! Whether you're a novice or an experienced angler, we're sure there's some advice in here to help anyone improve their lure fishing

BY ADAM NICOLSON

**T**here's no denying it, any new style of fishing can be daunting at first and lure fishing is right up there with the toughest... at first. But, the rewards of mastering a new technique or even just a brief moment of success with a lure can be enough to hook even the hardest of bait fishos. There's just something so rewarding about hunting and fooling a fish with an artificial as opposed to sitting and waiting with a bait.

Now, I've been on the water for over twenty years, I've read countless how-to articles by the best in the business and I've fished with some

of Australia's gun anglers but one mistake I will never make is assuming that I know it all. Just the other day I was fishing with a good mate that I fish with regularly and he taught me something about fishing that I have never even considered and I was blown away at the fact I had overlooked this theory as the logic was so obvious. After all this time fishing with the same bloke and I'm still learning something new and I like to think that a little bit of my knowledge has rubbed off on him too. That's why I've decided to compile a list of tips and ideas that I have gathered over the years for your reading pleasure, in the hopes that the most novice of anglers

and even the most accomplished can gain something from it. Some are cutting edge techniques while others are old law, but I can't simply assume that everyone will know these and I sincerely hope that anyone reading this can at least take one thing away and look to apply it on the water. Even better would be to catch a good fish due to that tip. The funny thing is, while rattling off these tips on paper, some old knowledge came flowing back that I had somehow lost in the deepest and darkest section of my brain so I essentially re-taught myself an old lesson that I can now apply to a new style of fishing. You never stop learning!



# GETTING STARTED

**1** Using lures is a natural progression as you get more into your fishing. Don't be afraid to start throwing them around as they'll bring a new and challenging aspect to your fishing that will ultimately keep you excited every time you're on the water.

**2** Do your research. If you're new to lure fishing, don't simply tie on the nearest lure to you (or the only lure you have) and start throwing it around without any knowledge of the lure or the target species' preferred lures. This will most likely result in failure and you'll revert back to bait only. Instead, talk to the experts in the tackle shops and the guys on the water and find out first-hand what is working well and on what fish.

**3** Target a particular species and not just whatever's around. You can target a range of fish with bait as the smell will bring the fish to you however lures are more akin to hunting. You have to find and stalk the fish so by selecting one particular species to target, you're narrowing the gap between failure and success by polarising your approach.

Modular soft plastics are without doubt the most versatile and effective lure on the market. Fish them deep, on the surface, weedless or however your imagination allows

Bibless lures comprise of metal blades, vibes and crankbaits. They come in a range of variations to suit just about any Aussie species

**4** In conjunction with tip 3, specialise in one particular fish. There is no better feeling than outsmarting a particular species on a regular basis. If you can achieve this, then you could say you've got them pretty well sussed. You can then apply the same techniques to move on to work out another species.

**6** Although almost anything that's not a soft plastic is typically "harbodied", the term "hardbody" typically refers to bibbed diving lures. These come in a range of different varieties and depth ranges and it's important to know what these are capable of before throwing them around. Some will float fast when stopped, some will float slowly, some will be neutrally buoyant (known as suspending) and others will sink at various rates. All will swim to designated depths due to the angle of the bib. The further down the angle of the bib, the less it will dive.

**7** "Vibes" or "blades" both operate on the same principal's but vary in the material they are made from. Vibes are generally thicker and are made from hard or soft plastic while blades are generally thin and are made from various metals. Both are bibless and cause a side-to-side rattle or vibration as they are retrieved. They are both generally weighted and designed for deeper situations.

## 5. GO MODULAR

Modular soft plastics are probably the most versatile lure on the market. They can be fished unweighted and snagless on a worm hook for getting into tight snags, they can be fished midwater for any fish holding higher in the water column or they can be fished right on the bottom for fish such as flathead, whiting etc. The reason for this is that the weight and the body are separate so the various combinations you can create are countless. There are no rules to rigging them, only guidelines, so don't be afraid to mix it up a bit

**8** Lures will perform to their maximum potential when used on outfits that are suited to their use so get your hands on the correct gear. It's like trying to hammer in a nail with a set of pliers, it will work but it'll be far more effective with the right tool. It doesn't have to be expensive, just get the weight, length and style right.

**9** Master the cast. Learn to cast well with a variety of different weights. Many situations when lure fishing call for a long cast or an accurate cast and if you can't get it right, often you won't be in the running.

**10** You may not catch as many fish on lures as you do with bait but the quality of the fish is undoubtedly better on a whole. I'd rather catch one croc-sized flathead than ten undersized fish any day of the week!





# CHOOSE WISELY

**11** Don't choose a lure because of its shelf appeal. Fancy packaging and next-level paint jobs are designed to reel in the angler, not the fish. Do your research and choose your lures based on their proven success or a particular quality that works well with the fish you're after.

**12** The old saying "match the hatch" still does and always will ring true. As a general rule, try to match your lures to the bait in the area. There are exceptions to the rule but this should be your first point of call when selecting the right lure for the job.

## 13. CONFIDENCE

Have confidence in the lure you've chosen. You picked it for a reason so fish it as though you know it will catch fish. It's interesting to watch how well an angler with a high level of confidence in his gear will do with lures.

Confidence is a big thing in lure fishing and proven lures like Gulp Jerk Shads certainly help when it comes to believing in the lure you're using

**14** Don't play favourites. Sure, there's no drama in having a lure that you feel works best for a particular species but don't keep casting that lure if it's not working. Fish are pretty clued and can turn off a lure if they've seen it fly past their nose a hundred times. Often, a change will evoke a strike almost instantly.

**15** Make sure the lure you're using gets into the zone of the fish you're after. There's no point dragging around a hard body that dives to two metres if the fish are showing on the sounder at 5 metres. If a hardbody doesn't get to them, think about the other options such as soft plastics, vibes and blades.

**16** Lures are often integrated with rattles which can be a good thing or a bad thing when it comes to attracting fish. There are no hard and fast rules here as to which works better but keep in mind that this could be a factor that influences whether or not you are catching fish and it's one thing that is often overlooked.

**17** Keep a range of lures on hand. You don't need to have hundreds or even thousands of dollars' worth of them but have a smart mix of styles and colours to cover any changes that you may need to make.

They don't have to break the bank but carry a range of different styles and colours to compensate for changing conditions and the fish's preference on the day

**18** Get the best you can afford. This doesn't mean buy the most expensive lures as there are some real fluffs that cost a fortune but there are also a lot of copies out there that simply don't work as well as the original. Usually the only reason something is copied is because the original is so effective and it can be hard to better something that is already that good, especially if the copy is a cheaper version.

**19** Think outside the box. Too many times have I said to a fishing mate something along the lines of "that won't catch a thing" due to it being a little strange only to have to eat my words minutes later. I don't say that anymore and I now relish the sight of a "whacky" lure that I haven't seen before. Fish love strange lures and often the results will come instantaneously as they get so excited about a lure they haven't seen (just like me). Use the same lure on resident fish for too long and you will watch them quickly become wise to it.

**20** Experiment with size. While there are popular sizes for various fish, you can shake things up a bit with a change in lure size if the usual is not working. Whether this is a downsize or an upsize will depend on experimentation but as a general rule, if the fish are feeding hard, I like to downsize if a change is needed while if the fish are lethargic, I like to give them something more substantial to eat so their effort for energy is warranted. It may work the other way around though.





# WHERE LURES WORK

**21** Lures work everywhere. If you think there is a situation where bait works better or that a lure won't work at all, then more than likely you just haven't found the right lure or the right retrieve style for the job.

## 22. PRESSURE POINTS

Pressure points simply because of the amount of water moving in the area. Pressure points are generally where the most water is moving so any fish that is feeding in that area will generally be feeding well due to the fact that fish don't waste energy without reason. They need to warrant the use of more energy with the reward of more food.

**23** Lures work at all depths. There are all kinds of surface lures, diving lures and deep jigging lures meaning there are very few if any depths that can rule out a lure. For the very extreme end of the scale, I quite often jig in around 500 metres of water for deep species such as gemfish and blue eye. Call it crazy but I love the challenge!

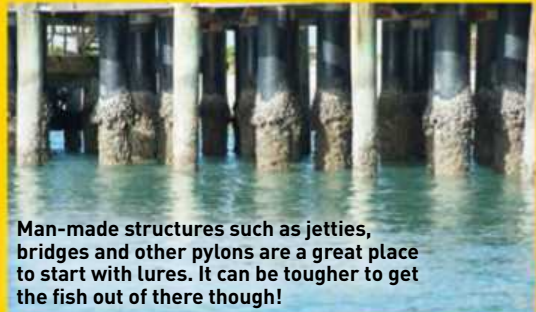
Northern lure fishos often target current and tide lines for barra and other fish but the same theory can be applied anywhere

**24** Remember you are almost always mimicking live prey when using lures so the best place to start is where the target species are chasing live prey. For example, a bream caught around washy rocks are often chasing morsels that have been washed off the rocks while a bream caught on the flats is more likely to be chasing live fish so naturally a "live lure" presentation will usually work better here. Don't forget though, there is a lure for the washes though, you just need to find it!

**25** Estuary flats are a great place to throw around a few lures and are great for a variety of species as well as for practicing with a variety of lures. Think along these lines; if fishing over sand and yabbie holes then small crustacean style lures or worm imitations may work best as the majority of the bait in the area will be of this type. If you're fishing flats with weed edges, a fish style lure can work better as small baitfish love to hide and feed in the weed beds.

**26** Current and tide lines. These are great for congregating bait in a particular area. Whether you're dragging big skirted lures around offshore for marlin or you're working a small runoff creek in the north for barramundi, these areas are a red hot place to concentrate your efforts. Try to work a variety of depths and on both sides of the change.

**27** Jetties and pontoons are a great place to catch structure oriented fish such as bream. Keep well away from the structure and make long casts as these are urban fish and are usually very wary of boat traffic. Target the edges that are being hit by the tide predominantly but don't leave until you've worked the whole structure.



Man-made structures such as jetties, bridges and other pylons are a great place to start with lures. It can be tougher to get the fish out of there though!

**28** Breakwalls are a great place to fish lures for species such as mangrove jacks, jewfish, flathead and bream. Instead of just throwing a few lures around though, target various sections of the wall for different species. Drift along and fish the deep holes with plastics for jewfish, fish tight to the rocks for jacks, fish the curved edge of the bottom where the rocks meet the sand for flathead and fish the face of the wall for bream.

**29** Drop offs usually occur due to fast moving water carving away at the bottom. Generally where there is a lot of movement there will be fish actively feeding. These may be lazy fish sitting in the current on the edge of the drop and waiting for food to come to them such as flathead or they could be active fish such as mackerel that will move along a drop off and use their speed to take advantage of any baitfish that can't out-manoeuvre them. Choose your lures here to suit the way your target species will be feeding.

**30** If you're fishing the snags, usually the larger snags on an outside bend of a river will hold solid populations of actively feeding fish. As stated in tip 23, the fish here will be feeding well due to there being more water moving on the outside bend in a river than on the inside. The advantage for the fish is they can shelter from the current behind the snag as well. Just make sure your casts are accurate!





# THE RETRIEVE

The way you retrieve a surface lure can be crucial to how effective it is on fish like this estuary perch

**31** Lures such as surface crawlers, stick baits and wakebaits can often benefit from holding the rod high to create more wake on the surface and also keep any line out of the water to better disguise the presentation.

**32** Pause for a cause! Stopping your lure can be more effective than working it with some fish so first of all know what fish like pauses and learn when to pause and how long for. Fish like barra really fire up when the lure is paused and allowed to float back up. Watch them in clear water and often you'll notice that the fish will follow the lure back up and then hit it right before it breaks the surface. Don't be afraid of long pauses.



**33** Suspending hardbodies are a good option when you know the fish are sitting at a certain level in the water. You'll know this by watching your sounder intently as you should always do. Make long casts past the fish and crank it to where the lure will be diving to the right depth then slow the lure right down and simply twitch it back to the boat, keeping it in front of the fish for as long as possible. This is a great technique on impoundment bass when they're holding high but can be used for any species.

**34** Look for the reaction bite when things are slow. A reaction bite can come from a few different avenues; a rapidly retrieved lure can force a quick decision from a fish to eat, a lure constantly cast or jigged in the same area where you know there is a fish holding can cause an aggressive strike in defence of territory and an oversized lure can be too much temptation for shut down fish not to eat. Play around with this when the fish are really slow.



## 35. CHANGE IT UP

Number one rule with your retrieve styles is to change things around when something is not working. Hell, even change it when something is working to see if the new one is working better. Constant retrieves, twitching retrieves, dead sticking, high sticking – they all have a time and a place.

**36** Striking a fish is as much an art as getting them to bite in the first place. This is why I mentioned way back in tip 4 that specialising in a particular fish can be a good thing. You then get to know how they bite and when the best time to strike is. Some fish will require you to strike at the first touch while with others, you'll need to wait a considerable time for the fish to commit to your offering.

**37** Slack line can be your best friend or your worst enemy. As a beginner, it's probably best to keep your line just taught to the rod tip so you can feel when a fish bites however slack line can increase the amount of bites due to the lure sinking naturally. If you do want to use a bit of slack, you must keep a constant eye on your line for any touches.



**38** In most cases you'll benefit from slowing your retrieve pace. I'm very keen on chasing jewfish on lures and the biggest factor in my success has come from one very handy piece of advice I received from a very competent fisho. "If you think you're going slow enough, halve the speed again"! This is the first piece of advice I would offer to anyone chasing jewfish on lures but it can be applied to most species.

**39** Work the water column well. If fish are scattered instead of holding in a particular depth, try to work the retrieve through various depths or try different lure styles that will work at different depths. There may be one particular depth that the fish will be more willing to eat in which could be caused by a thermocline. You can also see these on a good sounder so if you can, work the upper and lower sections of these.

**40** If you're targeting fish on schooling bait, cast and retrieve your lure just outside the parameter of the school. Predatory fish will see the lure as a vulnerable baitfish and will often take up the opportunity for an easy feed.



# TACKLE TIPS

**41** Lighten up! With just about any style of fishing you should be utilising the lightest line possible in order to remain stealthy however it is far more important in lure fishing due to the action of the lure being negatively affected by heavy lines.

**42** If you have multiple outfits on hand, rig them all with different lure styles that will work for the fish you're after, that way you can 'chop and change' to suit changing conditions or simply to try a new lure if one isn't working.

**43** Scent – I am a believer and you should be too. It's worth doing everything you can to maximise your chances and this is the sort of thing that can be the deciding factor. I don't think it hurts to have it on there and even if it aids purely as a placebo effect to boost your confidence then it's at least boosted your chances a little.



**44** It's my opinion that the sensitivity of braid is a benefit to all proactive approaches to lure fishing and even more laidback styles like trolling can still benefit even if it's only for the extra line capacity or the ability to go heavier without increasing the physical size of the line. The only reason I may not use braid on an outfit is if the fish are ultra-picky and I need to go to straight-through fluorocarbon.

**45** While on the subject of braided lines, if you're jigging; whether it be deep for kingfish and the likes or using ice jigs or blades in the dams for bass and yellowbelly, a designated jigging outfit that is spooled with multi-coloured jigging braid can be a major benefit to the angler by removing the guess work out of the approach.

**46** Wash your lures in warm soapy water and allow them to dry properly before returning them to your tackle box. This will keep them in A1 condition as well as all the rest of the gear in your box as well. Put them back covered in salt and you'll learn an expensive lesson!

**48** If you fish for a variety of different species like me, keep various tackle boxes for different situations so you're not constantly moving your gear around. It gets lost easily if you're doing this all the time. I like to keep a box for my light tackle estuary and freshwater work, a mid-range box for barra, jewfish etc and then I'll have my bluewater gear with stickbaits, big divers and skirts etc.

**49** Electronics play a big part in lure fishing. Quality fish finders have become an invaluable tool for finding active fish and electric motors have proven perfect for sneaking up on them and manoeuvring the boat for a better casting position.

**47** Some soft plastic brands don't mix well with other soft plastics or hardbodies. Store them separately so that melting and colour issues don't occur. The bonus to this is it'll be easier to find that particular colour or style when you're after it.

## 50. MONO VS FLUOROCARBON

Mono floats while fluorocarbon sinks. Two very important factors to consider when choosing your leader material. If you're using small surface lures for bream and bass etc, go with ultra-light mono leaders. Although fluoro is less visible, it sinks and will adversely affect the lures action.

A quality sounder is essential to consistent catches with lures



# TERMINAL TIPS

**51** Terminal tackle refers to split rings, swivels, lure clips, hooks and any other gear required to connect a lure to your mainline or to assist in its action. No matter how small some of these can be, they will all have some sort of effect on how your lure swims, how it handles the fish and how the fish view your lure.

**52** Lure clips – should you use them? I say yes if they meet a couple of requirements. As long as they don't negatively affect the lures action and as long as they don't deter the fish then I think they're a great addition to your set-up. I tend to only use them in light tackle situations as I don't trust any connections that can open when fishing heavier. Bream and bass can require plenty of lure changes and these can be great for swapping lures in a hurry, increasing the time you have a lure in the water.

Lure clips can be useful as long as they are a quality made brand and don't affect the lures action



A pair of good quality split ring pliers are a must for anyone serious about lure fishing



Who says you need to abide by the rules. Jig assist hooks can be added to the tow point of a popper for a better hook-up. It seems to be working here with the amount of teeth marks in this lure

## 53. STAY SHARP

Hooks are for hooking fish, so keep them sharp. You'll go to a lot of effort to tempt some fish so you really want to ensure that when those hooks find the fish they stay connected. I have three small files (different grits) in my box all the time. It's a 10 second task to sharpen a hook yet it is so often overlooked or just ignored out of laziness.

**54** Upgrading terminals is a must on some factory fitted lures but it should be considered on every lure you buy. Some brands insist on nothing but the best hooks and split rings but even some top brands skimp on this side of the build. Remember, don't take a knife into a gun fight.

**55** As well as upgrading your terminal tackle, it's just as important to keep a few spares in the box. Even the best gear can be overshadowed by the power of some fish. Carry a small amount of spare terminal gear so you can get back in the game.

**56** If a hardbody lure doesn't swim correctly straight out of the packet, don't discard it. It can be as simple as grabbing a pair of pliers and adjusting the ring on the bib to get it swimming as it was intended to.

**57** Get yourself a pair quality split ring pliers. These make short work of changing hooks and split rings where attempting to do it without them can have you ending up in a straitjacket.

**58** Experiment with retrofitting your lures with different hook styles if you're not getting the hook-up rate you're after. This can be as simple or as complex as you want to make it but the point is, if it's not working, change it.

Retro rigging can help in a few ways. Adding weight, attraction, action and also a better hook-up rate are just a few of the benefits



**59** Blades, skirts and flashes can be added to attract a certain fish species or add appeal and bulk to a standard lure. The only limit to pimping a lure is your imagination but remember, extra hardware can affect the lures action. Test them in a pool before you put them in front of the real deal.

**60** Unless the lure is designed to (or can) spin such as skirts and metal blades, then generally I'd avoid the use of mainline to leader swivels just to eliminate using extra hardware. The more stealthy approach is to incorporate a good mono to braid knot and learn how to tie it well so you have complete confidence in it.



# COLOURS

**61** Colour choice is hotly debated by many but don't assume that there is only one way to go. If someone reliable tells you that pink works well then use it but don't stick with it if it doesn't work.

**63** Many fish are able to see reflected UV light naturally where humans need a black light to see this. Knowing this, many manufacturers incorporate UV paint into their designs and so it is a worthy consideration when choosing your lures. Perhaps some more experimentation is needed with this?

**64** Dark colours are often seen better at night believe it or not. Especially on a moonlit night, dark colours create a much more effective silhouette where light colours don't.

**65** Remember when fishing in deep water, reds and oranges are the first to disappear. These will be seen as a more natural colour so if you're looking for something really bright for those deep water snapper or kings, go for bright yellows, blues or greens as these are the last to disappear in depth.

**66** I'm a big fan of lures with a bit of flash, especially in hardbodies that have a lot of body roll. That flash is sent a long way through the water and I believe it brings fish in for a closer look, it's then up to the presentation of the lure to draw the strike.

**67** Sometimes the slightest variations in colour can trigger a bite. Pimping your lures with permanent markers is always an option or you could design your perfect colour and have it custom painted. There are a few companies that offer this service with Geneo Customs being the standout. If you know exactly what you're after, send your favourite lures off to them to create your secret weapon!

## 62. GO NATURAL

In clear water and basically anywhere it's not muddy or dark, I'll opt for natural colours 90 percent of the time. By trying to imitate the colours of the natural baitfish in the area, you'll see more regular success.

In clear water, go for natural colours

**68** Pay close attention to seasonal effects when getting your colours down too. For example, I really like pinks and reds on the flats for flathead with the assumption that the pinks relate to a yabbie which is a popular food item for them. When prawns are running however, I would opt for a natural colour as I'm of the belief that they prefer the prawns if they can get them.

Some fish prefer certain colours so get to know what your target species likes. Flathead are suckers for anything on the red spectrum

**69** Geographical influences can be something to factor in too. A good example of this would be southern Bluefin tuna. A common method of capture is to troll skirted or hadbody lures for them and a favourite colour in the south is red or at least a lure that has some red in it. This is due to the fish feeding primarily on redbait however it doesn't make sense to adopt the same principles in their upper limits in NSW as redbait doesn't make it that far up.

**70** I find fluoro colours can really be a standout in muddy water when other lures are getting the refusal. Typically I'm not a fan of fluoro lures but sometimes they can be a day saver.





# RIGGING

**71** Loop knots – if you don't know how to tie them then you should learn. They are a super easy alternative and provide that extra bit of mobility to your lures instead of a standard rigid knot. Lures such as surface lures and bibbed diving lures are particularly advantaged by using these.



Loop knots are easy to tie and allow most lures to swim better

**72** Rig your lures on a suitable outfit to get the best action out of them. A swim bait will have a poor action when rigged on a super stiff rod while trolling lures like skirts and large hardbodies will be poorly affected by soft rods.

**73** Ever had that problem with soft plastics sliding down the jighead either when a fish hits it or even just on the cast? Super glue is your solution. Just add a tiny amount to a dry jighead and slide the plastic up over it. You will get a whole lot more from the one lure by doing this.



## 74. MIX IT UP

Think outside the box when it comes to rigging. Traditionally, lures are tied to the end of a leader and very few vary this but who's to say you can't mix it up. In deep water, a plastic fished on a paternoster rig will fish very well and there are other alternatives too. Don't be pegged down by the norm.

**75** Learn how to tie a quality braid to mono knot such as an FG or a PR. There are plenty of other good knots out there such as various forms of the albright, the slim beauty and even just a double uni but none of them can run smoothly through the guides like an FG or PR. If you're using lighter tackle, go for the FG, heavier tackle – either one works well.



**76** To keep your presentation as realistic as possible, try to use long leaders and fluorocarbon where it suits to avoid any chance of any line being seen. Remember, you're trying to fake a real baitfish here and you won't see too many with fishing line attached.

**77** A straight soft plastic is a good soft plastic. Too many people are lazy with how they rig SP's. Bends in the body of the fish are unnatural, they'll affect the way the lure swims and can also affect the hook-up rate. It doesn't take long to get it right but it goes a long way towards hooking the fish you're after.

**78** When fishing with a baitcaster for a more accurate cast, don't hang the lure too far off the tip when casting. You'll peg a far more accurate cast if the lure hangs no more than 30cm off the tip of the rod.

**79** Some lures can be attached via multiple tow points. Experiment with these lures in clear water to figure out how to get the most out of their action and what situations might call for a change of rigging.

**80** It's not always the case but as a general rule, a slower sinking lure will get more bites so rig your plastics with the smallest amount of weight possible. The sink is when many fish will take the lure.

A weedless rigged plastic with an incorporated ball sinker for extra weight is a great option on plastics in tight country





## CONDITIONS

**81** The most common misconception with lures is that they don't work at night. It's not true at all but a change in tactics may be needed. With the visual aspect gone, look for lures with a big action to attract predatory fish.

**82** Be smart about when you throw particular lures in relation to what bait are around at that time of day. Some fish tend to come out and feed on certain species in the morning and then others in the afternoon as the sun is higher in the sky. Slower moving crustaceans seem to be more prolific in lower lights, as they can be easily seen in the middle of the day and don't have the capacity to out swim predatory fish. Maybe creature baits in the morning and fish baits in the middle of the day? Food for thought.

**83** If you're fishing at night, consider the aid of light. Whether it be a quick shine of your torch on a UV lure or you're working it under floodlights. Baitfish and predatory fish are drawn in by lights so it pays to be aware of this at night.

**84** Concentrate around peak bite periods such as dawn and dusk in order to gain more confidence in the way you work them. This can only be gained by catching fish so it pays to up your chances, especially while you're starting out with lures.

**85** Bigger lures often work better in fast moving water as predatory fish expect that smaller baitfish won't be in the area due to their inability to fight the faster flow.

**86** In calm, quiet conditions, noisy surface lures work a treat. Whether it be popping a big noisy cup-faced popper on the reef for GT's or you're slow rolling a rattling cicada imitation for a bass, that sudden noise to a fish can be like ringing the dinner bell.



Big, noisy surface lures can work really well in calm conditions

**87** Pressured waterways result in fish seeing a lot of different lures and those lures can put out a lot of different sounds. A really popular technique for pressured inland waterways (where lures with rattles incorporated in them are popular) is to change to a completely silent version to extract a bite. This can work anywhere so don't just apply it on dams.

**88** Again on pressured waterways or anywhere for that matter, don't be afraid to go for a lure that's completely out of the ordinary. I'm a big believer in using strange lures and the fish seem to respond to them well as they haven't seen that type of lure often. My theory is if someone tells me it's no good, then it's probably worth throwing.

## 89. SOUND IT OUT

A good quality depth sounder can pick up thermoclines - a severe temperature break that occurs below the surface. Micro-organisms will hold on one side of these thermoclines attracting baitfish which in turn attract predatory fish as well. Try working your lures to the depth of the temp break to target the fish holding around the thermocline.

**90** Check out the Anglers Almanac for times of increased fish activity. This little book can really get it right and is based on the Solunar Theory. When the moon is directly overhead or directly underfoot, fish seem to turn on for short periods so be on the water at these times. If you can coordinate these times with a tide change then you're really on the money



Fish will happily take lures at night. You may need to adjust your tactics or change your lure but don't be fooled into thinking it's a no go



# SPECIES TIPS

**91 FLATHEAD** – Get your lure working hard along the bottom and stirring up the sand and bouncing off the rocks. The plume of silt and sand can really turn the lizards on and the lure will be sitting right there in their face.

**92 WHITING** – Surface lures are a great way to get a few whiting on the flats and a bit of chop on the water can really get them fired up. Fish pressure points where a sand bank is being blasted with tidal movement and work your lures reasonably fast across the chop. The idea is to imitate a fleeing prawn.

## 93. MARLIN

Marlin love to be teased. Watch your skirted lures with intent and if you see that dorsal fin rise up behind you lure, don't just sit idle and wait for it to bite, start cranking the lure in a bit, then stop it, then do it again and watch the marlin go from a dark black/brown to an iridescent blue – now it's ready to commit!



Don't assume that catching a marlin is just about towing lures around the ocean. There is plenty more to it

Slimline knife jigs are great for kingfish and they love the speed!

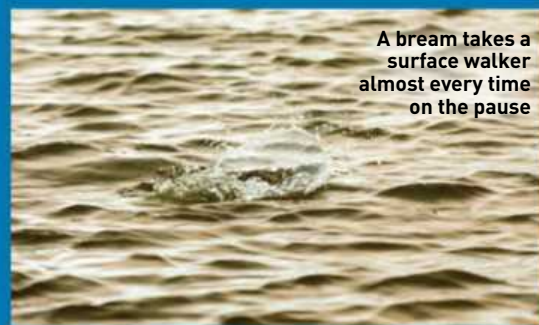
**94 KINGFISH** – Jig fast! They love the chase and you'll really see a benefit of working long streamlined jigs really fast. Short sharp jigs with a constant wind are good and also just a flat out retrieve can really fire them up too.

**95 SNAPPER** – Tails, skirts, flash and crazy colours are gun on snapper. They seem to like the weirdest contraptions such as pirate jigs and other 'pimped' lures with lots of attractions. SP's with long wriggler style tails work well too.

**97 BASS** – When in the impoundments, find deep fish schooling on steep edges by using your sounder. Heavy blades, spin tails and ice jigs are really effective in getting down to the fish quickly while you're able to also keep the lure in their face for longer. These stocked fish can take more enticing than a wild fish.

**98 MULLOWAY** – Jewies mark well so trust your sounder and fish areas where you know they are about. I'll get really excited if the fish showing up are high in the water column. They seem to be feeding more actively then and are a much better proposition.

**96 BREAM** – When using surface lures (or any lure for that matter), bream really love a pause. You'll often watch them follow a 'walk the dog' style lure without committing until the lure stops dead. It's the same with diving minnows; if you're slow rolling, stop it dead every now and then to entice a strike if a fish is following.



A bream takes a surface walker almost every time on the pause

**99 MANGROVE JACKS** – It's all about keeping in tight to structure. Diving lures that suspend are really good for jacks around snags and pontoons where you need to keep the lure in the fish's face for long periods. While it's in the zone, just twitch it rather than wind it back and hang on for that bone-jarring strike!

**100 SALMON/TAILOR** – Fishing from the stones, work metals at first light and as the sun gets higher in the sky, switch to 5 inch white plastics rigged on half ounce jig heads and work at a steady pace. This combination of two lures at different times really seems to get the inshore pelagics fired up.



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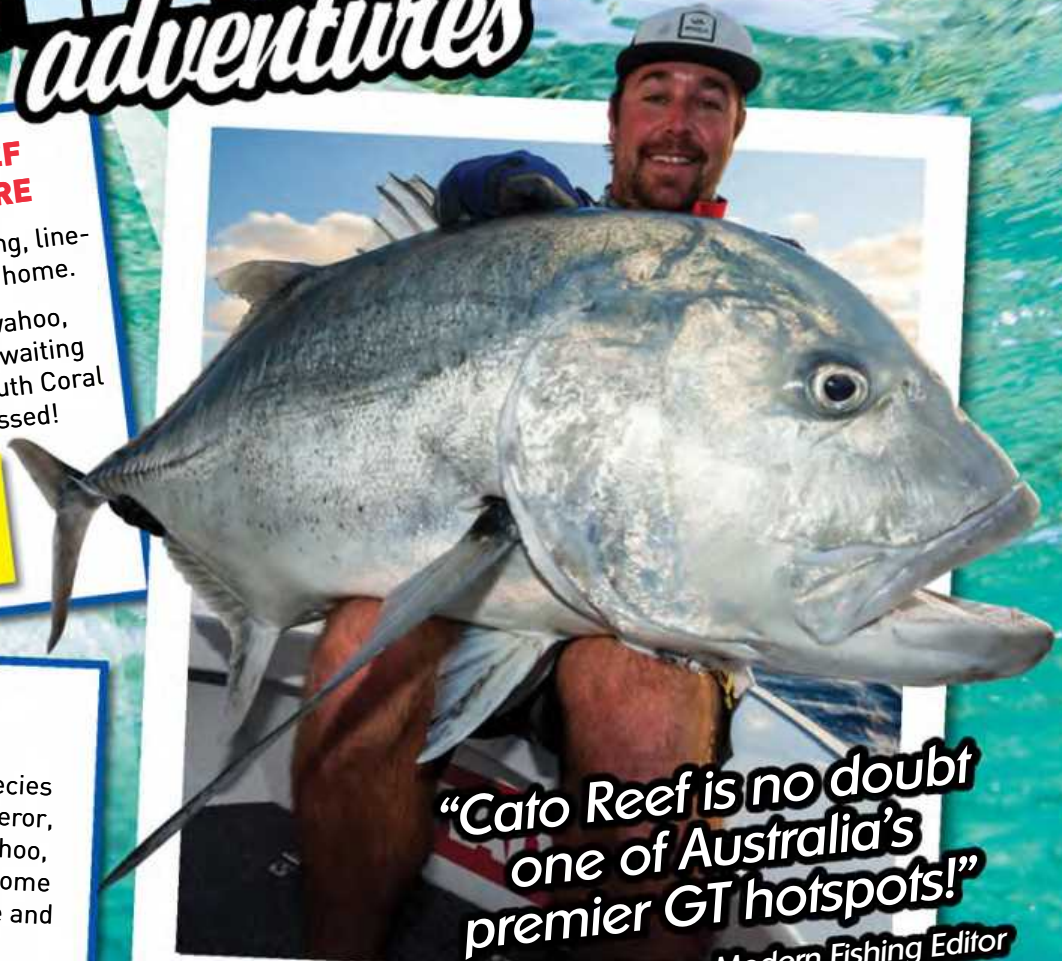
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# OFFSHORE TROUBLESHOOTING

Lee gives us some day-saving tips for those outings when your epic offshore adventure turns into a soul-sapping tour of struggle street

WORDS AND IMAGES BY LEE BRAKE









**T**here's an old fishing cliché that goes "do the miles, get the smiles", and it has a lot of merit, but what about those days when you run two hours offshore only to struggle to put together a feed? What do you do when your carefully planned fishing trip is going about as well as Kanye West's Presidential campaign? No one wants to shell out for all the expenses and come home empty handed, so I thought it only fitting to hook you up with a little "tech support." What follows are some simple but effective means of troubleshooting a slow trip.

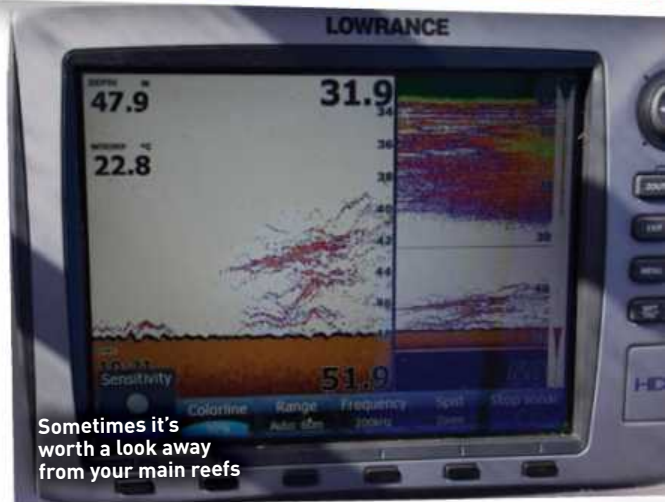
## STOP FISHING AND START SOUNDING

I've said it a million times, and I'll say it again, **you simply must find the fish first!** The most eyebrow-raising mark in the world is worth less than two knobs of goat poop if it's not holding fish. However, rather than move or give up, try putting out a few trolling lines and doing some circle work in the area. On many, many occasions I have found schools of fish tightly packed on minor patches of rubble or slight seafloor rises nearby to more major marks. Just last week for example, we pulled up at our favourite mark some 40-odd miles

offshore only for the sounder to read a clear 5m rocky rise and no fish. After a few fruitless drifts though, we did some exploring and found a show of fish that resembled a small Christmas tree rising off the bottom. The school was sitting on a very small rubble rise about 500m from the main mark, and was so concentrated that it took three drifts to get our baits into the fishes' strike zone. They turned out to be solid gold band snapper, tasty members of the jobfish family, and they saved us from leaving that mark with an empty esky.



Know when to fold 'em. If the reef fishing is slow, change it up and look for pelagics



Sometimes it's worth a look away from your main reefs



Pimping your baits can really turn the fish on

## NAIL THE DRIFT!

Which brings me to my second point – sometimes, close enough isn't good enough. Sure, when fish are actively feeding, you can miss a mark on the drift or when anchoring by a bus length and they will be all over it. However, if they aren't feeling overly voracious, then they will often hold tight to the mark or structure, usually because they are using it for protection or to simply rest away from the current. If that's the case, then you need to get your offerings right in their face. Once that bait or lure is right there, then more often than not, instincts will take over,

especially if the fish are in a school – competition is a wonderful thing! Just in case though, be prepared to seriously provoke those predatory instincts by really ripping or cranking your lure when you think it's in the strike zone. Remember prey flees as fast as it can; it doesn't sit in front of a predator and wiggle its tail...

This can work with bait too. Plenty of tentative bites have been turned into hard takes by pulling the bait away from the fish with a few quick winds or by dropping it into freespool so it plummets a few metres.



***“The most eyebrow-raising mark in the world is worth less than two knobs of goat poop if it’s not holding fish”***



## **GO BACK TO BASICS**

I love jigging and using artificials offshore, but some days you just have to go back to the good old pilchard or squid. Once again, there’s an old saying that rings true, and that is “action creates more action”. Think of it as giving the food chain a jump start from the bottom. Get the little pickers feeding and they will not only spread bits of pilchard and other bait into the current, they will also send out all those exciting

vibrations that predatory fish pick up with their lateral line. With any luck, you’ll start to boat a few legal fish and then as the action heats up, you can drop progressively bigger baits in the hope that the larger fish have woken up enough to assert their dominance and snatch the offering. Once you have one quality fish, try gradually transitioning some crew members back to artificials and see how they go.



## KEEP MOVING

This can be a tough call, but it's usually the right one – notwithstanding a couple of circumstances that we will cover shortly. To elaborate, an offshore trip should never be a journey from A to B. It should be an expedition that follows a track, dotted with assorted marks, that provides the offshore angler with a plethora of options. This track should also not be a spur of the moment decision; instead it should be planned out in advance to take into consideration things like fuel burn and access to potential safe anchorages/sheltered waters. Ideally you want to have half a dozen marks or spots that you could possibly try if you are struggling to find fish. And that's the key – you are finding the fish, not heading to a spot and hoping that they

will find you! It seems simple, but I have heard so many anglers say things like, "We anchored at spot X all day for nothing" and you can only shake your head and think - **Well, then why didn't you move?**

The obvious answer is usually that they don't know any other spots, but that's a poor excuse. I know of keen, and very successful, offshore

anglers who will search with their sounder for ten hours at a time, not fishing, just punching in marks wherever they see likely looking shows. And to be honest, if I go out and catch very little but come home with a couple of new and promising looking GPS marks, I'll chalk that up as a successful day. Think of it as an investment in future expeditions.



If the sharks move in, sometimes the best option is to leave them to it



Even if you're a staunch lure fan, don't be afraid to go back to the humble old bait when things aren't working

## KNOW WHEN TO HOLD 'EM

Now there are two circumstances, as mentioned above, that might overrule the keep moving option. Firstly, and most obviously, if you can see definite fish on your sounder, but they just won't eat, even after you've nailed the drift, then it can pay to persist at that spot. After all, finding fish is a big part of the battle; getting them to bite can often just be a matter of timing. Look at when the next bite period might be and consider hanging out for it. Something as simple as the sun coming up, the tide changing or some run coming back into the water at mid-tide on a neap day, might be all it takes to bring on a back-straining session.

The second circumstance usually involves a different type of mark. To explain, there are usually two types of marks that fish hold on offshore: foraging marks and habitat marks. Foraging marks are grazing areas that offer little protective structure to larger creatures but more than enough for prey level organisms like prawns, mantis shrimp and little fish – fern grounds, rubble patches, wire weed and soft coral grounds are

key examples. Usually a few drifts and a little bit of circle work with your sounder is enough to work out if there are fish there or not. These marks attract transient schooling fish like snapper, nannygai, red emperor and sweetlip.

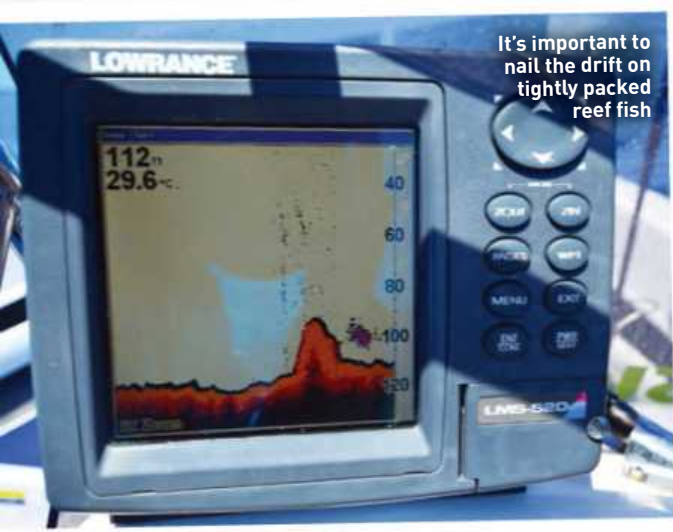
The other type of marks are more prominent structure types like hard coral patches (plate, brain etc), isolated bombie grounds, wrecks and man-made spoil grounds, and island edges and reef points. These marks provide homes to resident fish like cod, coral trout and trevally, as well as the odd big red emperor. While these fish are attractive to anglers, they often don't show up on sounder screens as they hold closer to the bottom and/or in smaller numbers, thus presenting less of a sounder return. For this reason, such marks can be worth persisting on as well. Often these are the marks that are best anchored on, at least until the next key bite period. Once anchored, do everything in your power to get the resident fish interested and feeding. Consider using a variety of baits as well as a berley bomb and even a set live bait or two.



Mix up your lures. Fish won't always go for the lure you caught them on last time



***“If I go out and catch very little but come home with a couple of new and promising looking GPS marks, I’ll chalk that up as a successful day”***



It's important to nail the drift on tightly packed reef fish

## KNOW WHEN TO FOLD ‘EM

Once again, this comes down to flexibility. Simply having the gear aboard to enable you to target different species can be a key troubleshooting tip. Many times I’ve headed out with the aim of chasing a few reef fish, only to find them uncooperative and then saved the day by trolling up a few Spanish mackerel on high speed lures. This, of course, works both ways. There’s a very good reason why most good marlin skippers also catch a lot of reds! It takes a dedicated, or foolish, skipper to drive away from a mark,

newly found while trolling, that is covered in reds!

Being prepared with the right gear is a good start, but also know how to read the signs that it’s time to “fold ‘em”. Things like seeing lots of bait balls around the surface and mid-water on your sounder, seeing wavy lines across your sounder in mid-water and having baits and jigs snapped off on the drop, and having to use extra-large leads to hold bottom, are all signs that it might be time to put the bottom bashing gear away in the name of some pelagic action.



## MATCH THE HATCH!

In my opinion, matching the exact bait at a location is a lot less important than a lot of people think. This is mostly because, if fish, especially competitive schooling fish, are already feeding hard, they are far from fussy. I've had nannygai eat green plastic frogs on paternoster rigs and reds eat tail-less soft plastics that have already been bitten in half. Also, if you nail your drift then the instinct bite is also usually enough to get the job done, especially if you are working the offering at speed.

The exception to the rule is heavily pressured marks or areas where you've spooked a school of fish, usually by dropping one. Once the fish are wary, the only solution can often be to match their exact food source at that mark – the prey they are most comfortable with. This can be tricky, but there are some handy ways to do it. You

can drop down a bait jig. A live bait from the mark is about as good as it gets. Alternatively, have a look at the stomach of a fish that you might have caught at that location before the bite shut down or on a previous trip. I've got a spot where the resident fish always spit up mantis shrimp and I know that I can drop a big shrimp-style plastic with a high chance of success, even if the bite is slow.

This is especially true when it comes to targeting pelagics. If they are fired up, they'll eat sinkers on the drop, but if they are wary from excess fishing pressure and boat traffic, you need to go all-out with presentation. It can always pay to have a few troll baits in your esky for just such occasions. A rigged local bait fish, like a gar or ribbon fish, can be the only way to get wary macks to bite when they shut down.



Match the hatch. It helps if you can find out what the fish are feeding on



Zerek Cherabin are a great mantis shrimp imitation

## BREAK OUT THE SUICIDE GEAR

This is really one of those last resorts, but it sure can be fun and effective. Some days, because of atmospheric pressure, lack of tidal flow, lunar cycle, wind direction, bad karma or whatever, the fish are just off the chew. That being said though, you can usually still get a few disinterested bites, just enough to use up your bait supplies. The best option is to realise that you are probably not going to need the 37kg gear and instead pick up the lightest combo you have on the boat (anything over 4-6kg is acceptable). With some light line and lead, you will be able to do a lot more

to encourage a solid take. Usually it will require feeding out line and really letting the fish take the bait without allowing it to feel any weight. If you've ever fished for whiting, you'll be familiar with the process. Then, when you do finally hook-up, it's always an epic struggle, no matter the size of the quarry. Usually you'll pick up a few better fish amongst the 'bait sized' specimens, and with some luck, you can still at least bring home a feed. Then, of course, every now and then you'll get buried into the reef or maybe even spooled, but hey, it's better than being bored!



If all else fails, break out the light gear!





***"You can't 'reboot' a bad day, but you can always learn from it, and a day where you learnt even one thing in the fishing world is never wasted!"***

## HAVE A BREAK

Sometimes we can be our own worst enemies when fishing. As the day goes on and the pressure to land fish builds, you can start to get tense and do silly things, like striking too early, using too much drag or going too hard on fish. Sometimes it's best to just sit back and recharge. Have a coffee and some lunch, or even head into a beach for a BBQ and a swim. Not only will you come back refreshed, but you'll realise that you can still enjoy a nice day on the water even when the fishing is quiet.



A day saving session on the gold band snapper was the result of searching the area with a fish finder



### GET IN

This last and final tip isn't for everyone and it isn't for everywhere, but for keen line fishos, it can be the true last resort. It can also be very educational. Yes, I'm talking about spear fishing or free diving. I know of a few anglers who take out their mask, snorkel, fins and gun on every trip and if the going gets tough, they get wet. After all, the fish don't need to be hungry to be speared! Swimming along a reef edge

or over a shallow bombie can also tell you where you went wrong with your line. For example, if you dive down and find that the fish are all tucked up under a ledge, then maybe you should have tried drifting an unweighted, or lightly weighted, bait in horizontally rather than fishing vertically with a heavy sinker. Be observant and take mental notes for next time you fish that location.

Light gear allows you to still have fun even on the small fish



Alright dear readers, that's all the troubleshooting we have space for today, but I hope it has given you some tips for those days when the bite is slower than a snail on sedatives. Unfortunately you can't "reboot" a bad day, but you can always learn from it, and a day where you learnt even one thing in the fishing world is never wasted!

Fish hard and stay safe. MF





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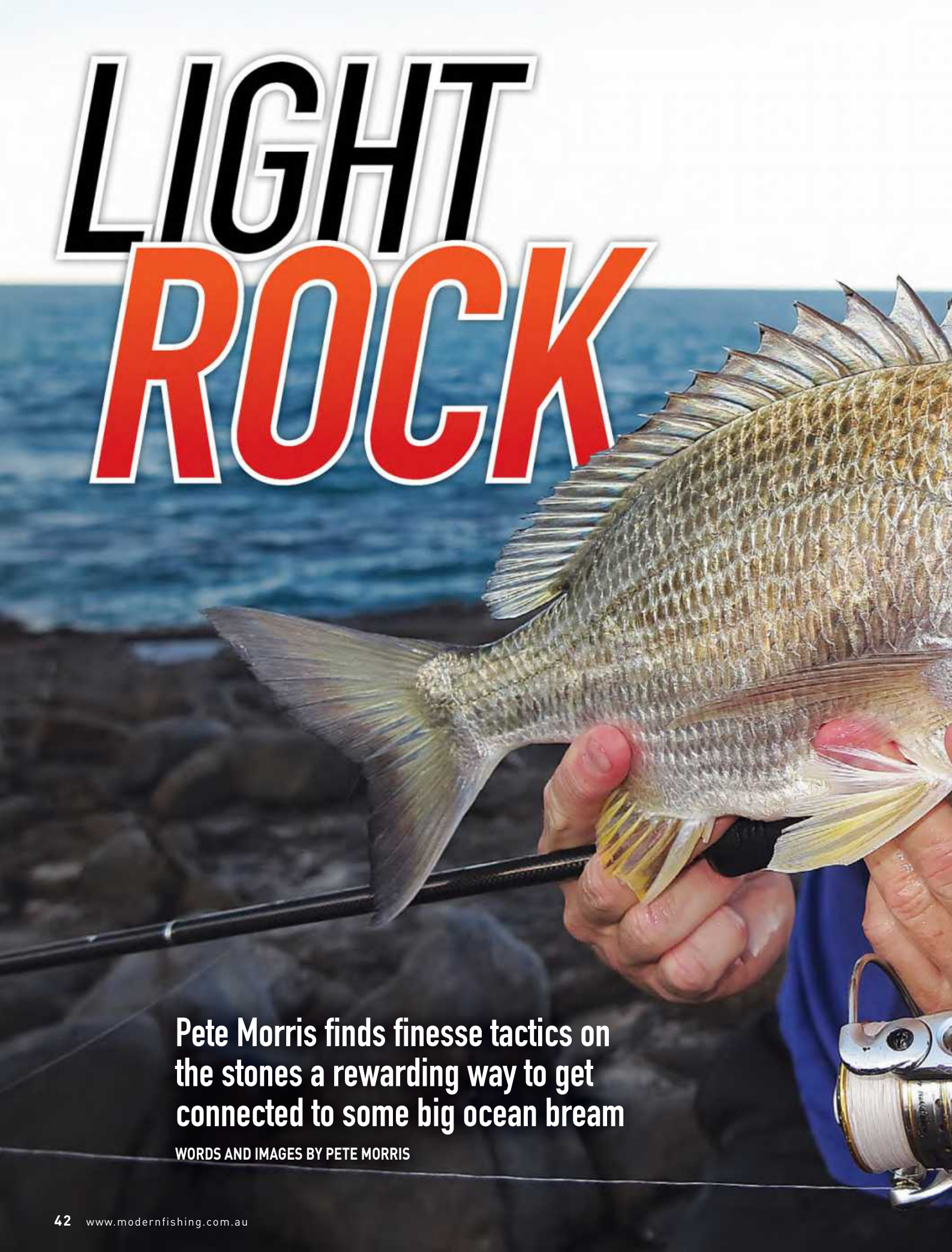
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# LIGHT ROCK



**Pete Morris finds finesse tactics on the stones a rewarding way to get connected to some big ocean bream**

WORDS AND IMAGES BY PETE MORRIS







**B**arnacle encrusted rocks, armoured crabs appearing as soldiers of the rock and needle like urchins suggests life across our ocean rock platforms is fairly tough going. As ocean swells continually drive their powerful and pounding force in what resembles almost anger at times, it really is an environment where only the strong survive. Often described well as a dangerous and challenging frontier between land and sea but there are always times where our seas abate giving way to far more favourable angling conditions. Rock platforms offer both serious excitement and some tough fishing challenges but the rewards are great for those looking for something a little different when it comes to light tackle lure fishing.

A plastic featuring a wriggling tail is an excellent selection for rock bream work



***“The added bonus to fishing light on the stones is the bycatch in the form of snapper, tailor, salmon and even the odd kingfish!”***

A nice fish now worn out after a good fight on light line



Tarwhine regularly get in on the action around the rocks and are very serious fighters on light gear





A late afternoon double header.  
When the shadows creep over the  
waters edge it signals feeding time

## ROCK PLATFORMS

Oceanic rock platforms are fairly unique and incredibly important environments. They contain a huge variety of plants and animals that are able to cope with the physical stresses of big swells and waves, the constantly changing weather conditions and two complete tide cycles each day. At first glance to those unfamiliar with the rocks themselves, our platforms can appear to be the home of little more than weed and a few limpets taking a grasp within the intertidal zone. To gain a far better understanding of the diversity itself however one only needs to look closely at one of the many 'rock pools' that have been formed (or more accurately 'scoured'), by a millennia of constant wave action. The really interesting factor about life in rock pools is that no two are ever the same and while there are obvious differences in overall size and depth, life within the pools themselves

also differs greatly. In general, the deeper the pool the greater diversity of species. Crabs and other crustaceans are amongst the first more easily spotted life forms throughout the pools, while small fish like gobies dart around the bottom feeding on tiny crustaceans. Along and around the edges we find sea stars of all sizes, larger red anemones and under boulders many smaller species of anemones may also be present.

The attractions for predatory fish is starting to become fairly obvious. Our ocean rock platforms are a place of opportunity, with an enormous amount of food available (both plant and animal), and are also areas that offer genuine comfort and protection via rock formations and undercut cave like areas. As an angler, these facts can be comforting as you have prior knowledge that fish will most certainly be drawn to your chosen wave washed platform.

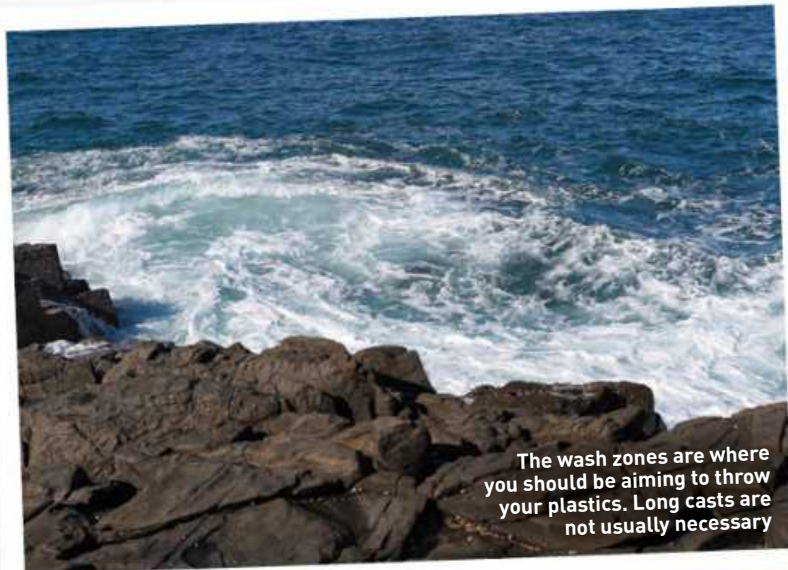


### WHERE TO BEGIN

As a species, bream are rightly described as an active 'forager'. In any environment they are found in, bream will often be encountered foraging or more actively on the hunt for easy prey. Along our ocean rock platforms bream are no different and here they quite cleverly use the elements to their favour. The wash zones are the key areas to begin your search and here bream will happily feed with gusto. The wash zones are those areas which feature a nice amount of 'white water' or wash, created by rolling swells which hit and recede back from the rocks themselves. This white water creates a mini washing machine effect and can quite easily dislodge small crabs, smaller fish and vegetation from the rocks which all become easy prey for roaming bream. The wash also offers a certain amount of cover to hide amongst and although bream are very comfortable across this environment they are a species that will always remain on high alert from all predators. These come not only in the form of other much larger predatory fish such as yellowtail kingfish, cobia and mulloway but also from large birds of prey. With these factors in mind, bream are an incredibly alert species with the sharpest of eyesight and the ability to move at speed when necessary.

It is important to emphasise also that the naturally

occurring wash zones are in close and there is rarely any need for long distance casts to be made. In actual fact bream will be found hard up against the rocks waiting for any easy meal to come their way. While there are certainly differing scenarios that can be possible such as a smaller reef complexes or bomboras sitting out a small distance from the rocks, in general the mainstream action will occur almost at your feet.

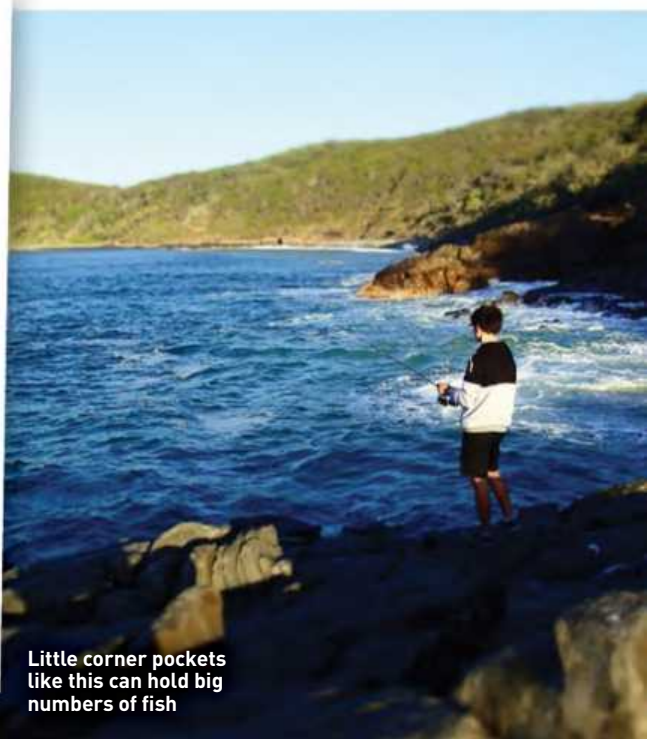


The wash zones are where you should be aiming to throw your plastics. Long casts are not usually necessary

***"In general the mainstream action will occur almost at your feet"***



Bream in profile are incredibly handsome fish



Little corner pockets like this can hold big numbers of fish





## SOFT PLASTIC TECHNIQUES

Before commencing any land based rock session you must seriously assess the sea conditions with safety your number one priority. There are of course low lying rock ledges and ones that sit higher but the reality here is that you really MUST have calm conditions. There is a big difference between powerful dangerous swells creating wild conditions and severe side sweeps, to those where a nice gentle wash is creating the perfect conditions. You must also remember you are using light gear that is more at home in an estuary so to be able to deliver small ultra-light plastics with any kind of effectiveness the sea really needs to be flat.

Once a ledge has been selected you will very quickly discover the benefits that a good pair of polarised sunglasses offer. On calmer days you will be able to clearly make out the bottom formations such as sand, reef or close in bombies. This is of course incredibly beneficial as it arms you with the knowledge of where you need to cast, where fish are most likely to be and what depth you are able to let your plastics sink to before ultimately snagging up. With the white water washy zones firmly in mind, your emphasis is now on the delivery of your chosen plastic. Begin by choosing a jig head that will match your conditions. In general, I commonly begin with a 1/6 ounce head. Ideally what you are trying to achieve here is for your chosen presentation to appear very natural and this comes via a very slowly sinking offering. A heavy jig head will do nothing more than plummet to the sea floor looking very unnatural and possibly snag up along the way. A slow sinking offering will on so many instances be taken on the drop down so keep an eye on any slack line.

Retrieval types with a slowly sinking soft plastic need not be complicated. A very slow single or double twitch of the rod tip is all that is required as the hopefully small swell and wash will also add to your lures overall action. In the case of 'wriggler' tailed soft plastics the water movement will really kick tails into life and smaller movements from your rod tip will keep your lure in the desired strike zone for longer. As you become in tune with your lures movements, your next challenge is how you go about fighting your fish and while some may look at bream as an easy push over, on light gear from the rocks bigger bream and their cousins the tarwhine, do not come easy. Tarwhine in particular can and will fight dirty, diving for the base of rocks at your feet and in many instances if you try the stand and deliver technique you will be the loser. On many occasions I've had larger fish at the edge of the rocks while the fish dive and play rather dirty and this is often when the free spool technique can save you. If for example you have a fish close to a zone where you are looking to wash the fish up but cannot get the desired wave to assist and your fish dives in a last ditch effort for cover, keeping tension on the fish can often see a bust off. Quick thinking and a total free spool of your reel can see the fish believing he has won his freedom and swim out away from the dangerous edge zone. You are then able to engage your reel and put some pressure back onto the fish. It is a technique to keep in mind and can often be the difference between landing a great fish or you simply looking at a busted leader.





### SUITABLE GEAR SELECTION

It's hard to paint a picture of finesse when you're talking about such a harsh environment. However with some applied logic, the light line finesse approach can be put into practice very well across our ocean rocks and you'll soon see a noticeable increase in the amount of hook-ups. A light graphite rod around 7ft in length with a rating of 1-3 kg, balanced well to a reel in the 2000 size range is a suitable outfit that we would often use from the stones. The versatility of such a set up in conjunction with finer braided lines and light leaders dramatically changed the way we fish ocean rock platforms.

What I personally like to do with the land based rock work is to move up a very small notch in gear to cope with the harder terrain the rocks feature. In a river my common finesse bream set ups are often 3-4lb braid with 4lb Fluorocarbon leader whereas along any rock platform I



A nice trio caught on the three inch Gulp Nemesis soft plastics




Smaller grub, crab and minnow style soft plastics are the 'go to' presentations

will move up to the likes of 6lb braid and commonly use 8lb fluorocarbon as my leader. What this does is give that little bit more reassurance against bigger bream that take a liking to any of the structure. If in doubt while using 8lb leader remember here that water conditions do allow for this small move up in your artillery as a scenario of more turbulent water creating wash differs far greatly to the still clear water conditions often found throughout the estuary.

Soft plastic choice is simply enormous and on today's market just about every type of fish, grub and crustacean pattern exists in some form or another. Many will work well but for me personally my preferred choices are always the smaller grub, worm and crab patterns as these are great representations of what the fish are actually feeding on in these areas. I am also a big fan of those plastics offering a more continual scent release. Jig head selection is another often overlooked area but an incredibly important one. Your goal should always be to fish with the lightest head possible while at the same time retaining effectiveness to deal with washy conditions. A head too light will be rendered useless where as one too heavy will sink to the bottom quickly missing any potential mid-water bites. I will commonly use heads in the 1/8, 1/6 and 1/4 ounce and will match the conditions of the day. Another area of vital importance is to check jig heads regularly as a simple knock against the rocks can have a hook point folded over very easily. This can potentially cost you a trophy bream or tarwhine as it fails to penetrate the fish's tough bony jaws.

The added bonus to throwing small soft plastics from the ocean rocks is that many other species can jump in on the action.

Hard fighting yellowtail kings will quickly have you and your gear destroyed in no time whereas species like Australian salmon will give a serious sporting contest on light tackle. Tailor are not so friendly as they scissor through light leaders and your favourite plastics in quick time.

Light soft plastic work is an absolute buzz that is available right across our entire coastline and it doesn't take much to get the job done. Next time you're heading down to that favourite platform, take a light set-up and a minimalistic approach and most importantly, enjoy that zing of a light drag under full protest! 

***"Take a light set-up and enjoy that zing of a light drag under full protest!"***



A standard size fish commonly encountered around the rock wash zones



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# KING OF THE DRIFT





A photograph of four King George whiting fish held vertically against a clear blue sky and a glimpse of the ocean. The fish are silver with yellowish-brown spots along their sides. A fishing rod is visible in the background on the right. On the left, a person's arm in a black shirt is partially visible, holding the fish. A fishing lure is also visible on the left.

**Drift anchoring is proving to be one of the deadliest techniques for tapping into those famously fickle King George whiting. Alex Ciccozzi shows you what it's all about**

WORDS AND IMAGES BY ALEX CICCOTZI



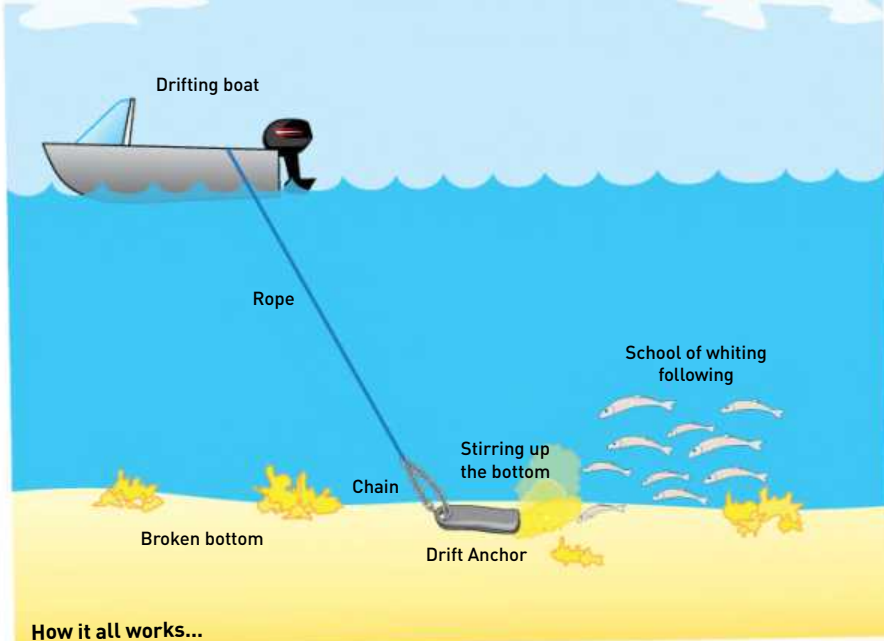
**F**ickle, frustrating, temperamental and annoying. In addition to a few expletives of which I'm not game enough to repeat, these are the common words I'm often confronted with from anglers describing the ins and outs of King George whiting fishing.

King George whiting are notoriously one of the most frustrating saltwater species to target as not only are they difficult to track down at the best of times, but their ability to come on and off the bite at the flick of a switch is somewhat mind boggling. Just when you think you've got them figured out, another curve ball is thrown in your direction and you're back at the drawing board contemplating past theories and designing up new plans of attack. It is this sense of challenge however that drives many anglers towards dedicating a portion of fishing efforts towards chasing these spotted critters, but at the same time there are also those in which the opposite effect occurs and the fish are placed into the "too hard basket".

King George whiting (or KG's) are found throughout most of southern Australia and are considered to be a year round prospect with numbers swelling throughout the winter months as fish school up to spawn. They are great scrappers on appropriately rated tackle but what makes them a prized recreational target is undoubtedly their high regard as a quality table species. KG's are typically targeted from a stationary position at anchor and a usual day out on these fish involves repeatedly dropping the pick at likely spots until the fish are hopefully located. Whilst this remains an effective way of fishing for KG's, there remains a certain lack of ingredients that we have found to be highly conducive in KG behaviour and consequently, fishing results. In recent times our success rate on these fish has improved markedly with much thanks to a deviation in tactics from traditional methods. I refer here to the drift anchor theory and whilst I'm sure this technique is foreign to many, it has certainly opened my eyes to the potential on offer as it implements the principles that commonly characterise the behaviour of KG's.

## DRIFT ANCHOR THEORY

Drift fishing is a simple no brainer; it allows you to cover ground and find the fish as opposed to sitting at anchor to commence the waiting game. Anglers have been adopting drift techniques for many years and it undeniably works well on a host of species, however the particular use of a drift anchor in KG whiting fishing is where the key to better success lies. Now, I'm not referring to a sea or wind drogue that sits near the surface of the water and is primarily designed to slow down the drift speed of the boat, but instead a weighted "anchor" that drags along the sea floor. I use the term anchor quite loosely here as it is technically not designed to hold the boat in position, but it opens up a whole new world on the whiting front and the results should generally speak for themselves. A drift anchor setup serves a main primary purpose of being able to stir up the bottom as the weight drags through, and what we find is that when this occurs the whiting will often rush in to investigate as they look for an easy feed amongst the churned up sand and bottom debris. If the fish are playing the game it is not uncommon for a school of KG's to continue following the drift where they can be picked off one by one by fishing out behind the anchor. Furthermore those who chase whiting regularly would also appreciate

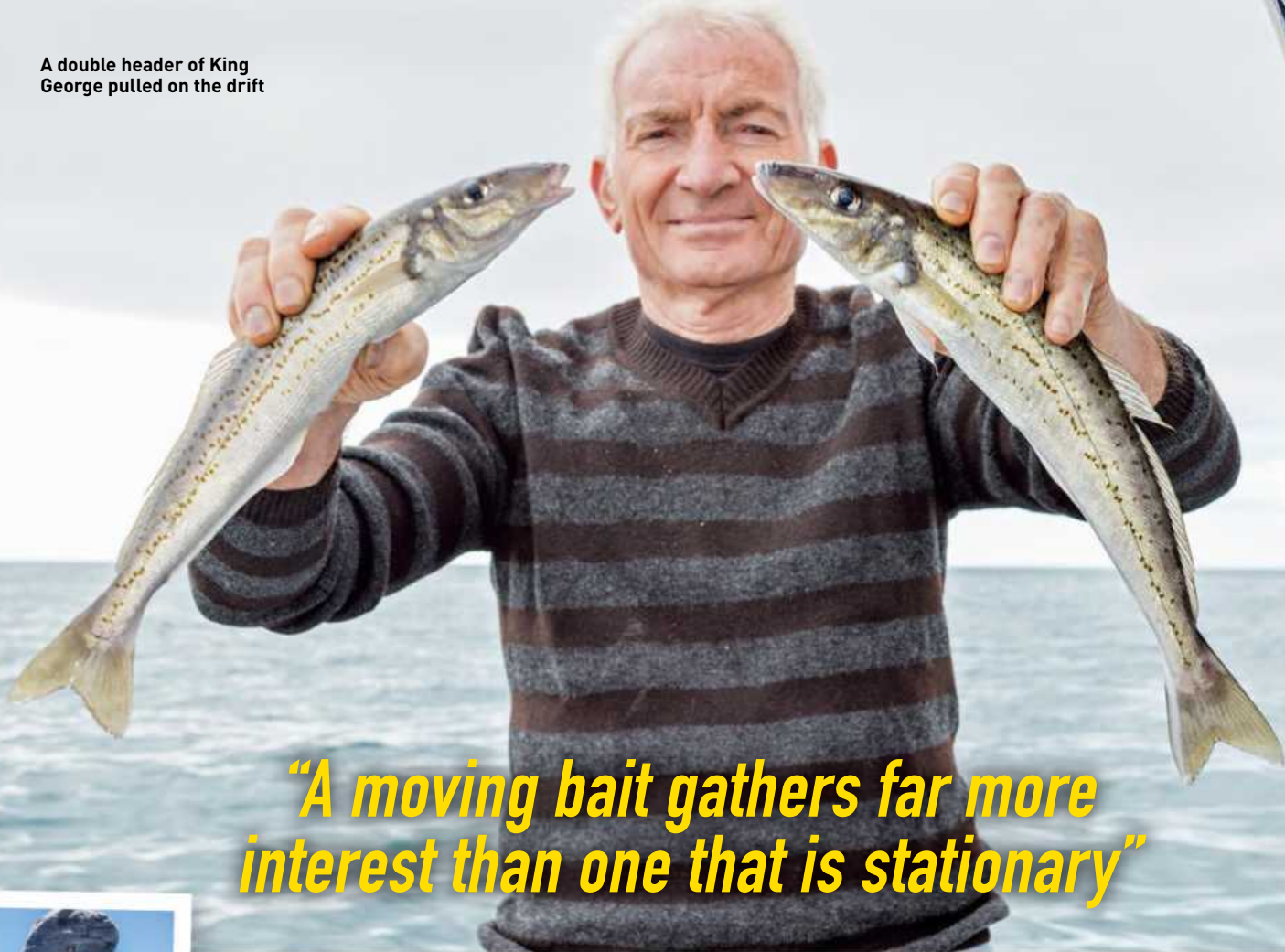


that a moving bait gathers far more interest than one that is stationary, and this ideology is also put to use through this drifting technique.

The anchor itself is fairly simple to setup and often some old scrap metal lying around the place is enough to do the trick. We use an old piece of farm yard machinery steel which works well as it's smooth enough to run along the bottom without problems. Running off the anchor is a short span of chain that is attached to a length of telecom rope (long enough for the depths that we fish) wound onto an empty electrical cable roll. To give you an idea on weights, we keep two different sized drift anchors on board, a 14kg and a 7kg weight, and alternate between the two depending on conditions. Drift anchors can also be bolstered with the addition of a slop line or small berley pot, however we've had enough results without utilising either option to suggest they are more cosmetic than anything.



A double header of King George pulled on the drift



***"A moving bait gathers far more interest than one that is stationary"***



## FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS

To fish for whiting effectively with a drift anchor setup conditions must first be suitable. A gentle breeze of around 5-10 knots is what I would consider fairly ideal as it is just enough to keep the boat moving and the fish usually respond quite well. Wind speeds beyond 10 knots are still fishable but you'll definitely be needing the heavier anchor to maintain a slow and steady drift rate. An accurate GPS can be handy here and I'll often aim for a drift speed of around half a knot or just shy of 1km/h. Speed is a crucial element for success

as if you're pumping along too quickly the fish will barely have a chance to follow and grab the baits. Glassy conditions are always welcomed during a day out on the water but unfortunately they are not conducive to drift anchoring due to the lack of current. When this occurs we will either remove the anchor from the water all together or just leave the chain to drag along without the weight attached.

Vast areas of broken bottom are by far the most conducive and have undoubtedly produced the most fish for us. This sort of environment works great as not only is it often home to large schools of whiting but the terrain itself is quite forgiving and the drift anchor is free to drag along without becoming stuck. Gentle rises, channel edges or banks are also worth investigating and can often hold good numbers of fish if the bottom make up is right. Steer clear of heavy rock or reefy terrain as you'll not only potentially lose the drift anchor amongst the hard ground but your rigs will frequently become hooked and lodged on the bottom.

A good quality sounder as well as a knowledgeable understanding of how it operates is certainly advantageous in deeper water where the bottom can't be seen. Speaking of depths, how deep to fish is realistically location dependent but we've had best results with this technique in anywhere from 6-20m. Any deeper and it starts to become a bit of an effort to run a drift anchor setup, whilst fairly shallow water is also not ideal.



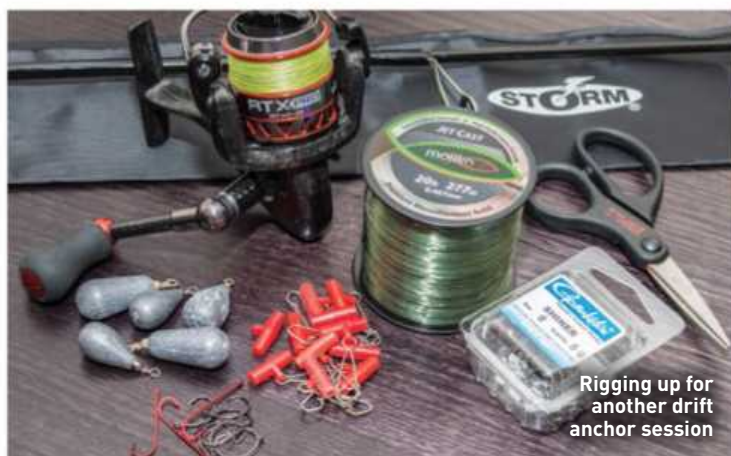
**The most vital piece of equipment is the drift anchor itself**



## RIGGED TO DRIFT

Standard whiting outfits around 2-5kg or 3-7kg are ample, suiting water depths up to around 20m and sinker weights to 60gm and we rarely need to fish any heavier than this in the drift ground locations we frequent. Spin gear is common fare however my preference for baitcasting outfits has certainly taken a strangle hold in recent times. Despite their primary use as a lure casting outfit, baitcast reels hold a slight advantage when fishing on the drift which I'll endeavour to explain a little further on.

As far as terminal tackle goes paternoster rigs are fine but I prefer to run a modified extended paternoster which is more suited to this style of fishing. This involves running the bottom hook below the sinker which allows the bait to waft along the see floor whilst the top hook remains suspended above. I attach my sinker through the addition of an ezy-rig which makes it simple to change weights when either drift conditions or water depths change. Size 6 long shank hooks are pretty standard for KG whiting but over the past few years I've been having some great success with the Gamakatsu Shiner hook. The shiner is essentially a wide gape style hook which is almost similar in nature to a circle but slightly varied. The benefit I've found with these hook is that they don't need

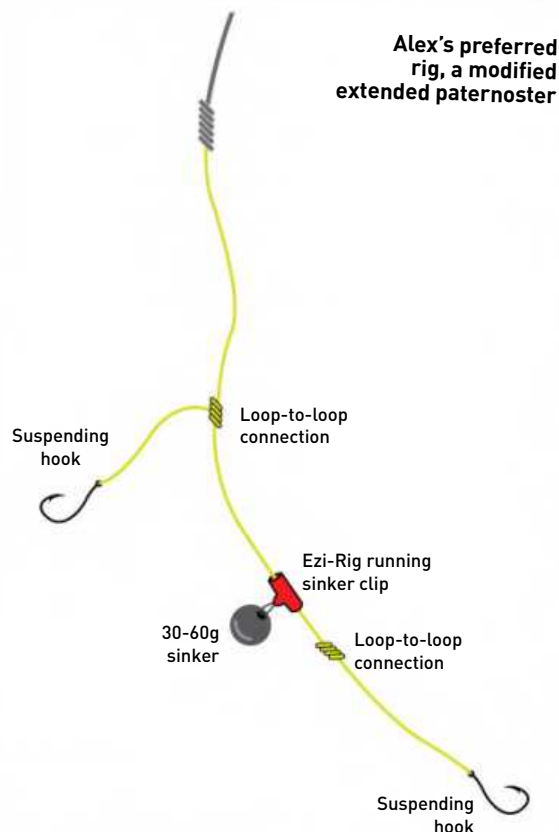


Rigging up for another drift anchor session

drawcard for many anglers. Circles still play a role when drift anchor fishing for KG's and are often best utilised on what I prefer to call a sleeper rod setup. The sleeper rod is essentially an unmanned rod, preferably slow taper in nature, left to its own device in the rod holder, and it never ceases to amaze me how often this rod goes off before all the others. The soft taper of the rod in combination with the circle hooks at the terminal end means fish often end up hooking themselves on the drift, providing a sneaky way to help swing the odds further in your favour.

***"Drift anchoring allows you to cover ground and find the fish as opposed to sitting at anchor to commence the waiting game"***

to be fished in a similar fashion to circles, meaning you can strike at bites without hesitation. They also seem to hold better in the corner of the fish's mouth in comparison to long shank hooks, essentially translating into less pulled hooks and less gut hooked fish which is a massive



Alex's preferred rig, a modified extended paternoster

Usual whiting baits will often suffice but small squid strips are my preferred option with this style of fishing. Unlike pipi's or pilchard chunks, they hold extremely well when threaded onto the hook which is a crucial characteristic when the bait is wafting and dragging along the sea floor. Squid strips will also provide more resistance against the small pickers which often make short work of softer baits when they're out in force.

Some quality by-catch can turn up so ensure those rigs are well tied



Fish size and colour can vary as you encounter different schools along the way

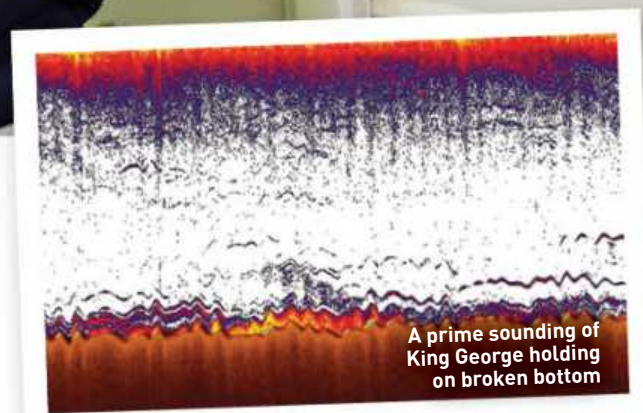






## FISHING ON THE DRIFT

The trickiest part about drift fishing is getting used to the overall feel of what your bait is actually doing and in the early stages it often takes a few trips to get your eye in. The sinker dragging along the sea floor can often reverberate through the rod tip which many anglers mistake as whiting bites when first learning, but once you're in tune to the idea and have hooked into a few fish everything will start to make sense. As far as the technique goes, firstly drop the drift anchor to the sea floor and tie off the rope to a cleat along the back third of the boat, ensuring that at least a 30 degree angle is present between the rope and the side of the boat. Casts should be directed out behind the drift anchor as this is where the fish are likely to sit as they follow the drift line. It pays in this instance to vary the distance behind the anchor with each cast until you work out how far back the fish are holding. If the fish are in the mood they should follow the drift for at least an extended distance but it is always worth having the GPS on and marking in any areas where fish are located. This allows you to work the same line and area with repeated drifts on the days that the fish aren't following. Anchoring on top of marked fish is always possible however we generally find that doing so completely reduces the bite as you lose the important aspect of fishing with a moving bait which the whiting go absolutely nuts for. Marking in areas where fish are encountered will also help determine behaviours and patterns over time and this sort of information is priceless to any angler.



Whilst on the drift it is not uncommon to encounter different schools of fish, often depicted by their average size, condition and even colour. If you are lucky enough to find a patch of bigger fish, marking it in on your GPS will allow you to specifically target the school if they're holding in the location in order to optimize your fillet sizes. Any legal King George whiting is a good whiting in my books, but the fillets off of those big kidney slappers sure dwarf those from a just-legal fish! Some awesome by-catch is always on the cards too, and luckily for us some of the grounds we frequent are often home to some quality snapper which are an absolute hoot on the whiting gear, so it certainly pays to make sure your rigs are well tied.

On the days when the whiting aren't throwing themselves onto your hooks, and let's face it, this is more the norm rather than the exception, then a few handy tricks can be implemented to help keep up the success rate. Slack lining is by far my favourite little trick when chasing these fish



## TIPS & TECHNIQUE

and it often gets the whiting fired up. Being a fairly timid species at times, whiting will often shun away from a bite when pressure is felt from the other end of the line and when drift fishing this is usually a constant variable. Because of this I intermittently free spool the reel in order to produce a momentary belly or slackening of the line until it slowly tightens up again in sync with the drift. I can't begin to fathom how many fish we have hooked through this technique and it appears that on occasions, the whiting will happily follow a bait until it briefly pauses during the slack line period and then they'll take a swipe at it. Baitcast reels are best suited to this purely from a comfort point of view as you need not worry about opening and closing the bail arm repeatedly but rather disengage the spool through a simple press of your thumb. This will allow you to remain in better touch with your bait as those few extra seconds of difference in comparison to a spin reel can often mean detecting the bite as opposed to missing it completely. KG whiting sure are quick buggers so you need to constantly be on your toes and in tune with your rod! Bouncing the sinker on and off the bottom or even wafting the rod around quite vigorously can also be enough to stimulate a reaction bite, so you really do need to mix things up as the one thing I've found consistent with the fickle King George whiting is that they rarely behave the same between sessions.



King George respond extremely well to slack lining on the drift with baitcast reels

***"The food that the drift anchor stirs up out of the sand drives the King George wild!"***



It's smiles all round when the fish are on

## DRIFTING WITH CONFIDENCE

Initially I was quite unsure about the whole idea of drift anchor fishing for KG whiting after being introduced to it many years ago, but once I saw the results I was instantly sold and haven't looked back since. Nowadays I hardly spend much time at all sitting stationary at anchor and playing the waiting game, but instead I'm out working the broken bottom grounds in search of fish with drift anchor in tow. There will inevitably be those days when you are marking fish and failing to hook any, even when you're sitting at anchor or implementing the drift anchor technique, but don't take it personally, it's simply just King George whiting doing what they do best. **MF**



Calm conditions are not always conducive to drift anchor fishing



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# RAISING THE BAR



Longtime LBG fanatic Goshie sheds some light on the fast-paced, adrenaline-charged world of spinning for Spanish mackerel from the stones

WORDS AND IMAGES BY GOSHIE



## LAND BASED GAME

**W**ith one glimpse of a Spanish mackerel, it's obvious that evolution has perfectly crafted this fish as one of the finest predators swimming in the ocean. These highly sought after gamefish are known for their aggressive feeding habits and are capable of destroying lures at warp speeds. Ever since the high-speed spinning craze of the late 1960's targeting line burning Spaniards has been a popular pastime amongst Aussie rock hoppers.

Spanish mackerel are also known as "narrow-barred mackerel" or simply as "bar-ees" amongst the Land Based Gamefishing (LBG) fraternity. Most fish encountered by recreational fisherman range between 5-20kgs. However the occasional monster has been known to drag the scales down to 50kgs. School sized fish usually travel in large numbers while the big rogues often hunt in small packs or even as solitary fish. They are a formidable target species from the stones and I've been dying to share some of the knowledge I've gained over many years of fishing for these silver bullets.

## HOT SPOTS

These toothy predators occupy the warmer tropical and sub-tropical waters along the northern half of Australia. Large headlands that are surrounded with deep water and inshore reef systems usually hold excellent numbers of mackerel.

Spaniards are commonly targeted from the rugged cliffs along Western Australia's north-west coastline. The most iconic locations for targeting these hard running fish are Steep Point and Quobba. At times these remote ledges can produce biblical runs of mackerel and I would consider Steep Point and Quobba as the best two locations in the country for targeting these pelagic speedsters. Throughout this region, the summer months generally produce bigger numbers of fish, while the winter months are when you are more likely to encounter the larger 20-30kg specimens. Over the past decade some of the biggest mackerel I've seen taken on lures have come from Whistling Rock at Quobba Station.

On the Queensland coast, excellent numbers of mackerel can be captured from The Mackay Breakwall, Bustad Head, The Urangan Pier and 1770. The Catwalk which is situated on the small coastal Town of 1770 is fast becoming the most popular spinfishing destination for targeting Spaniards on the east coast. In these warmer sub-tropical waters, the mackerel usually show up in September and can be captured from the rocks right through to late May.

The waters of northern New South Wales can also produce reasonable numbers of Spanish mackerel, however land based captures in this region can often be a little inconsistent as exceptional currents are required to push these fish down the coast. During the recent NSW north coast LBG season plenty of fish were taken from locations such as Hat Head and the Iluka Breakwall. This insane mackerel bite lasted for over a month and during some of these red hot sessions there were more than ten fish landed in a day. Although the majority of these Spaniards were only school sized fish ranging from 5-12kg it's great to see such healthy numbers of mackerel in northern NSW.



The top spots can get crowded



Aaargghh... bloody sharks!

Chris Hack and an 18kg fish spun from Quobba







Adam Epifanis and a cracking fish from the Catwalk

*“Seeing five feet of Spanish mackerel leap ten feet into the air to attack a well presented surface lure is a life-altering experience!”*

## MACKEREL HARDWARE

Traditional spinning for Spanish mackerel involved a box full of metal and not much more. As effective as metals are, these days we like to experiment with all manner of lures and have found a few varieties to be equally successful.

### METALS

When spinning for Spaniards it's very hard to go past metal lures as they are relatively cheap, durable and are excellent for shore based casting. Some of the most popular metals for targeting Spanish mackerel include the 85gm Surecatch Knight and the 60gm Surecatch Bishop. These lures are made from chrome-plated brass and are perfect for imitating baitfish such as slimy mackerel, yellowtail scads, mullet, herring, gardies and fusiliers. All of these common baitfish are a major food source for a big hungry bar-ee.

When using chrome lures like Surecatch Knights, I cast as far as possible and let the lure sink to the bottom. Once I have felt my lure hit the bottom I crank it to the surface as fast as possible. This gives the fish very little time to analyse the artificial target and they will often strike on instinct – a reaction bite. This is an extremely simple yet effective technique and works well at all the popular spinfishing locations.

Spaniards are very efficient predators and utilise the entire water column for feeding. As a result these aggressive fish

can strike your lure at any time. Some fish will grab your lure after two cranks of the handle while others will leave it to the last second and lunge at your lure at base of the rocks. These cunning fish are also known to inhale metal lures as they are fluttering down the water column so make sure you stay alert while your lure is sinking.

Metal spoons are another popular lure used for targeting mackerel from the shore. These metals do not require a fast retrieve like most other profiles and simply flutter through the water column like a wounded baitfish. The 50gm Flasha works well on big Spaniards and I've seen numerous fish over the 20kg mark landed with these spoons from the Catwalk at 1770.

### SWIMMING LURES

Certain swimming lures such as deep divers and bibless minnows also work well on mackerel. I have found that these lures can often out fish metals when the water is discoloured or murky. Swimming lures are designed with an in-built action and constantly vibrate through the water. Predatory fish like mackerel can use their lateral line and other senses to hunt down swimming lures without relying entirely on their eyesight.

The Rapala X-Rap SRX-14 in the “Glass Ghost” colour and the Nilsmaster Invincible 15cm in the “Yellow Belly”





## LAND BASED GAME

are two proven performers. The Nilsmaster Invincible has been around for decades and is still the lure of choice amongst some of the pioneers of the west coast LBG scene.

The Oven at Steep Point is the ideal place to cast these minnows especially when you have a strong southerly breeze blowing behind you. It's a spectacular sight watching schools of mackerel obliterate them with ferocious sub-surface strikes from the gin clear waters of Shark Bay. The Rapala X-Rap and the Nilsmaster Invincible both travel about a metre under the surface and mackerel seem to be attracted by the aggressive side to side tracking motion of these lures. These shallow divers work best with a medium-paced retrieve, avoid winding too fast as they will simply skip out of the water.

Another lure which is starting to gain a cult following amongst land based anglers is the Lively Lures 5 Inch Mack Bait in the custom "King of Chrome" and the "Green Goblin" colours. Mack Baits are classified as a bibless minnow and are designed to be a multipurpose pelagic lure. During a recent trip to Steep Point in March, the "King of Chrome" Mack Bait was the standout performer. Even though this trip was cut short by Cyclone Olwyn we were still able to land more than 20 Spaniards with the chrome Mack Bait in just over a weeks fishing. The biggest Spaniard of the trip was landed by Justin Anthony and weighed an impressive 18.5kgs!

When casting these bibless minnows from the rocks I usually let them sink for approximately ten seconds before cranking them in with a medium to high speed retrieve. When Mack Baits are retrieved at the correct speed these lures will stay in the water and will continue to work until they are retrieved right to the base of the rocks. They contain an internal lead weight in the front section of the lure and weigh approximately 75gms. The body of the Mack bait is made from Polyurethane which is not only excellent for rock abrasion but this material is also tough enough to withstand the constant battering from the razor sharp teeth of a Spanish mackerel.

## SURFACE LURES

Surface lures such as poppers and plugs are great for attracting mackerel. Large Spaniards will often charge from the depths and launch at surface lures with tremendous force. Unfortunately the hook-up rate on surface lures isn't crash hot due the nature of these aerial attacks, but seeing five feet of Spanish mackerel leap ten feet into the air upon attack of a well presented surface lure is a life-altering experience!

Mackerel are not fussy when it comes to poppers and I have seen plenty of fish landed on small pencil poppers as well as big dumbbells the size of a coke bottle that were intended for big GT's. The River to Sea Dumbbell and the Black Jack Cubera are well weighted poppers that are perfect for shore based casting. The low lying reef ledges surrounding the Quobba coast such as the Two Mile Reef, Mata Hari and Camp Rock are well suited locations for targeting mackerel on big cup-faced poppers.

A surface plug which is becoming very popular amongst land based anglers is the GT Ice Cream. The best profiles for targeting mackerel are the needle nose and skinny needle nose plugs that weigh between 3-5onces. These plugs cast like a bullet and dart across the surface like a terrified baitfish. The action of the GT Ice Cream is just as effective when fished from water level or from



*"They are a formidable target species from the stones"*



the high cliffs. This makes it one of the most versatile surface lures on the market. When targeting Spaniards with these plugs, it's important to retrofit the original Dacron assist cord with either two split rings and a swivel or a short length of multi-strand wire. This will prevent your hook from being scissored off by these toothy terrors.

## SPINFISHING TACKLE

Using a heavy tackle spinning outfit loaded with 50lb braid has become common practice for targeting Spaniards. One of the main challenges for a land based angler is setting the hooks on a monster fish. The oral anatomy of a big bar-ee consists of an extremely hard bony jaw which is stacked with a row of razor sharp teeth. To consistently penetrate this kind of hardware you need to set your reel with approximately 8kgs of drag pressure. Using 50lb tackle will allow you to strike with force and this will give you the best chance of getting a solid hook up.

When fighting a mackerel from the stones achieving a good hook set is important as these fish can be excellent escape artists. After taking a line burning run a Spaniard will often change direction numerous times during a fight



The Lively Lures 'Mack Bait' is proving to be a must-have lure for spinning mackies





## LAND BASED GAME

and will even swim straight back towards you. If you haven't buried a hook through the fish's jaw, your lure can easily dislodge during the fight.

Another good reason to use a heavy tackle outfit when chasing Spaniards is due to the plague proportions of resident sharks that commonly patrol LBG hotspots like Steep Point, Quobba and 1770. Big bull sharks, bronze whalers and tiger sharks are usually the main perpetrators. When the resident sharks are hunting with a pack mentality the recovery rate on hooked fish can be as low as 10%. There is no doubt that you will sneak out the odd fish on the lighter 20-30lb gear but consistently landing big Spaniards from these heavily fished areas with anything less than 50lb tackle is almost impossible these days.

A good quality threadline reel like the Daiwa Saltiga or Shimano Stella range is ideal for hunting down big bar-ees. With a high speed 6.2:1 gear ratio and a large capacity spool you can easily retrieve over one metre of line with every rotation of the handle. Having a quality threadline reel with this kind of pulling power certainly takes a lot of the work load off the angler when high-speed spinning.

When it comes to selecting a suitable rod any good quality 8-11ft rod that is designed for casting lure weights between 55-150gms is ideal for the job. On a recent trip to Steep Point I used the new Assassin 2X Heavy Shore Game Rod and captured some solid mackerel up to 17.5kgs. This 11ft rod is purpose built for shore based casting and I found the extra length extremely handy for whipping out lures like Rapala X-Raps and Mack Baits that are a bit lighter than the norm.



Double and even triple hook ups aren't uncommon when the bait moves in

Quality spin gear only as mackerel put in some lightning fast runs!

*"I'll happily put in a thousand casts just to feel that classic bone-jarring strike from a lure crunching bar-ee!"*



## WIRE TRACES

In order to achieve consistent captures, it is essential to use a wire trace when spinning for Spaniards. I always use a 30-40cm length of 69lb Mason single strand wire with a swivel at one end and a small solid brass ring on the other. The single strand wire can easily be attached to the terminals via a haywire twist. The solid brass ring is attached to the split ring of your lure while the swivel end is tied to a 2m length of 60lb mono shock leader. Having a good generous length of leader is crucial when fishing from areas like the Quobba coastline. The monofilament leader will give you some abrasion resistance when trying to wash a solid fish on the lower ledges that surround the majority of this coastline.

## HOOKS

After spending more than a decade chasing mackerel on lures I have switched between singles and trebles on numerous occasions. During this time I have caught plenty of fish with both singles and trebles and I'm yet to discover a real standout performer between the different hook types.

Whether you choose to use singles or trebles, it is important to use a good quality hook with a razor sharp point. Personally I prefer thinner gauge hooks as they can penetrate the hard bony jaw of a mackerel with greater ease. I retrofit the majority of my lures with Mustad 7794DS trebles.

If you prefer using singles The VMC Siwash is an inline hook which is perfectly designed for lure casting and features a razor sharp point and large barb which rarely pulls out once it is lodged in the fish's jaw. The 5/0 and 6/0 VMC Siwash is perfect for chrome lures like the 85gm Surecatch Knight and a wide variety of surface lures.

**Goshie's seen his share of Spaniards and then some but still gets the same thrill as the first fish back in the day**




**The Catwalk in 1770 offers the chance at some quality fish**

## THE BAR-EE WINDOW

When I'm specifically targeting mackerel, I usually concentrate my efforts around peak feeding times which I commonly refer to as the "bar-ee window". This is when I really go head down and put in the casts. Early morning is definitely the best time to have a lure in the water as these fish have exceptional eyesight and can feed in low light conditions. The late afternoon spin session can also yield good numbers of fish, however I have never found it anywhere near as productive as the early morning bite.

When it comes to moon phase, I try to plan most of my trips around the new moon. During this section of the moon phase the dark skies make it hard for these opportunistic feeders to hunt at night which usually makes them a lot more aggressive during daylight hours. I have also found the high tide change to be another period of major feeding. The bigger mackerel seem to favour the high tide as this is when I've landed the majority of my 50lb-pound-plus fish.

Spinning up a big trophy Spaniard is considered a dream capture for most land-based anglers. The key to hooking these monster fish from the rocks is all about spinning your arse off and constantly dragging lures through the water. I'll happily put in a thousand casts just to feel that classic bone-jarring strike from a lure crunching bar-ee! 





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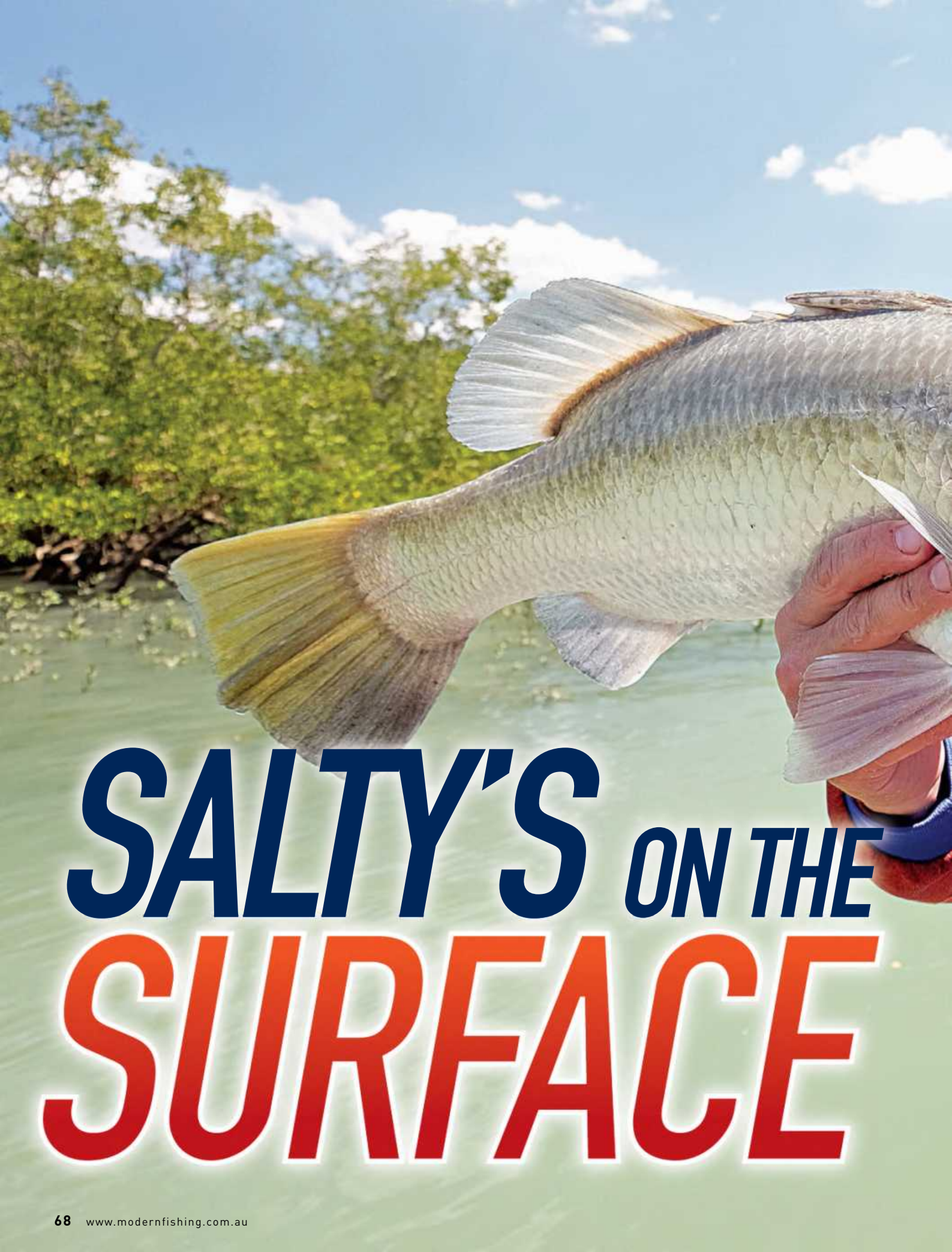


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# ***SALTY'S*** *ON THE* ***SURFACE***





**Tempting saltwater barra on surface lures is a whole different ball game to the typical top end techniques as John Cahill explains**

WORDS AND IMAGES BY JOHN CAHILL AND BENJAMIN CURRELL



**T**he water was rushing back in the little creek now, tied up to a tree on the opposite bank we were set to cast the far side as the water covered it. The mid afternoon sun was brutally hot and without a breath of wind, the sand flies were loving it (and us!). The target was a stand of young mangrove tree sprouts that were at this time two foot out of the water on that last bend in the creek before it emptied into the harbour. In pretty quick time the shoots were almost covered with water and the mullet rushed up the creek and with them the barra followed and immediately we started to see them. The fish were taking up residence in and on the edge of the mangroves and were happily picking off mullet that came in range. Some stuck out like a sore thumb as they actively cruised, others were harder to see. We had already accounted for half a dozen nuggety fish from this spot as Ben fired in a bent minnow, 1 foot past and two feet in front of a moving barra - this one a little better than the rest, probably nudging 85cms. There was skill in the cast and also in the assessment of where it needed to be. Twitch, twitch and the fish moved into range - a clear and decisive movement by the fish followed, then a pause and 'boof!' It was inhaled. Ben's skill at getting the bite and avoiding snagging up the cast was testament to his abilities and now his fish fighting credentials in thick cover was in question. With a solid fish tearing around in the mangroves it was no surprise he lost this one, but getting the bite in this environment pretty much makes up for it. Top water sight casting for barra - does it get any better than this?

Whether you have done a little barramundi fishing or a lot, there is always something to learn and try. It's no secret that I am a massive top water lure casting fan and with mate and Territory guide Ben Currell, we have explored a fair bit of top water casting over the last few years in the top ends billabongs and backwaters. Even in the saltwater, plenty of the bays close to Darwin have produced some barra action on top casting at snags. Ben has always been keen for me to visit on the right tides in the dry season in Bynoe harbour to experience some true top water sight casting, so we did just that early in September this year. It was handy timing in that it was

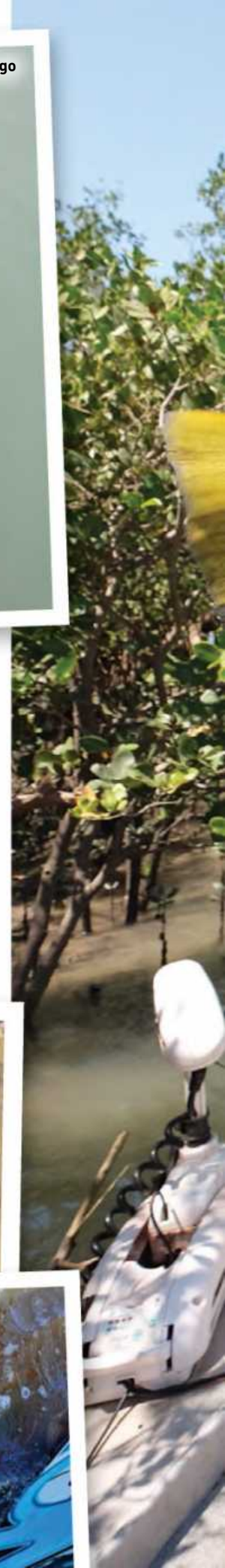
starting to warm up and the fish were getting active and I had pretty much had enough of a bitter Melbourne winter. Ben had a good game plan, mostly fishing small creeks, flats and drains at precise points in the tide. I was amazed to actually see so many fish, on the flats was the most obvious visually as fish moved up with the rising tide or fell back ahead of the ebb. On the dead lows, we found fish in the drains that could be cast to as the water barely covered their backs, on the flood the fish were active and pushing in on the flats and creeks everywhere with the water, so many places to be at once! It debunked any thoughts in my head about how barra move about or reside, these are very active fish that move considerable distances with tidal movement and were certainly not shy at striking a surface lure in bright sunshine, so much for only fishing at dawn and dusk for a top water bite.



Letting one go



The perfect target. The big yellow tail is unmistakable





A man wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, a blue cap, and sunglasses is holding a large barramundi fish. The fish is silver with a yellowish tail and has a lure in its mouth. The background shows a body of water and some trees.

***“You won’t find too many forms of fishing on this earth more rewarding when it all comes together”***

## **SALTWATER ON TOP**

You can achieve a top water bite anytime in the salt no matter the water condition if you wish to persist. Barra have excellent short range eyesight attuned to their environment however it's pretty hard to see through mud. Beyond a few feet they are pretty blind although they are highly developed to sense vibration through their lateral line which assists in dirty water or low light feeding. This should give a few clues as to lure choices for these conditions; make some commotion in dirty water. In cleaner water where visibility is a couple of feet more, options open up and you might get a chance at seeing fish or at least they have a better chance of seeing your top water lure. Pepperings drains, rock bars and snags will be a good choice in these conditions.

Not often thought to be a barra lure, the larger Bent Minnows from OSP are proving their worth



### SIGHT CASTING

On smaller tides when the water has a chance to freshen up and clean up in many locations it is the time for some true top water sight fishing. I was amazed that even at the bottom of a tide with very little water covering a small drain, active fish will cruise in and out on to the mud flats surrounding them with barely enough water to cover their backs. In the creeks as the water rises and falls they take up residence on the fringes among the mangrove roots and spouts in a foot of water, the flats will often contain dozens of cruising fish at any time and if there is enough water, then any snags are worth an

inspection as they love to hang off the edge of branches. It's always eye opening to try to track their movements successfully and cast at fish rather than in an area likely to hold fish.


Casting at these fish is quite different from prospecting, the cast needs to be exact and your placement based on where the fish will move to. The cast needs to attract the fish's attention without spooking him, it is exhilarating stuff and has similarities to trout fishing. Cleaner water is the key to this fishing, places out of the influence of strong water movement and wind are crucial.



***"If you get a refusal, chalk it up to something new learned and keep it in the think tank for the next shot"***

### SPOTTING TARGETS

When they are static barra tend to sit parallel or with the head down so often all that is visible is the yellow paddle tail near the surface, your eye gets attuned to it after a while and for Ben, it's second nature. Often what's in plain sight can be missed by being impatient and expecting to see the entire fish. Fish that are actively moving are of course easier to see and tend to be the obvious ones. My experience is that if you can see a couple then there are probably plenty there that you can't see, especially if there is a ripple on the water which makes scanning all the likely pockets difficult. A pair of polarised sunglasses are essential to take the glare off the water's surface.



**As well as the yellow tail, look for that tell-tale white strip on their head**



Barra are one of the few fish you can reliably target with surface lures at any time of day



## GETTING THE BITE

Keep this in mind – nine times out of ten, if you spot a barra in the snags, he'll be stationary or at least moving very slowly. This gives you plenty of time to take a breath, think about where you're casting and fire it off. I know.... I know, the adrenaline is pumping and I've made the mistake of casting too quickly myself but honestly, barra do tend to give you a fair shot at them so slow it all down and concentrate on getting the cast perfect.

As with any cast barra lure, a retrieve that optimises time in the strike zone with pauses has a greater chance of eliciting a strike, especially when inviting a fish to rise to strike on the surface, you need to give him time to decide and rise to boof the lure. Move too fast and it's unlikely to happen, barra are pretty lazy really and like their targets at close range.

Mangrove edges are the perfect spot to sight cast as the tide recedes



The pause is where it's at. The best part of sight casting surface lures to barra is being able to watch every strike and every reaction to how you move your lure. Not too many fish allow the sort of insight into their feeding patterns as barra do as it all happens very slowly so keep a keen eye on what's happening. Once the fish has seen your lure and hasn't spooked, you need to get it interested. Keep it close and use small but deliberate movements – watch as every twitch draws it closer and once the lure is almost on its nose you'll notice the fish rise to it with intent but very slowly – stop it and get ready to strike. If you don't strike almost instantly, you can wave bye bye to that fish as they spit the lure remarkably quickly and almost never come back for round 2.

If you never get to the striking stage and instead get a refusal, chalk it up to something new learned and keep it in the think tank for the next shot. I think you can learn more from failure than success when it comes to barra on topwater.





## CHOICE LURES AND TACKLE


Accurate casting is vital, and behind actually finding fish to cast at in the first place, accuracy is the factor that will most influence your success. Most barramundi casting is done with a bait caster for the ability to control the cast length which makes them vital for this application. A six foot rod rated 6-8kg and 20 to 30lb braid is about right for this application combined with 40 to 60lbs fluorocarbon leader of 6 foot in length and capable of flicking your lure of choice. Unless you are highly skilled with spin tackle, leave it at home. Otherwise a 3000 to 4000 sized reel on a 6'6" rod is about right, make sure that whatever rod you use has the backbone to control bigger fish and a tip with enough grunt to set the hooks.

In regards to lures we find that smaller lures are less likely to spook fish in the shallows so our selections reflect this mostly, there are so many choices, some of my favourites are:

- OSP Bent Minnow 106
- Cultiva Tango Dancer 95
- Lucky Craft Gunfish 115
- Maria Wise Dog

Remember, topwater fishing can be a bit more challenging to get the bite from barra but I urge you to persist with it as the rush of a barra boofing your lure off the top is about as good a feeling as you'll get in fishing!

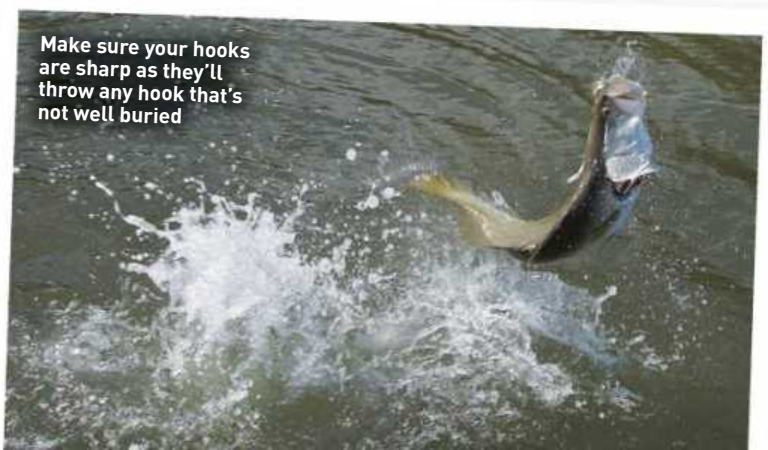
In the run off when the big girls roam, they are aggressive feeders and top water is certainly an option, sight casting less so. Ben has enjoyed success on metre plus fish from working stick baits, an aggressive walk the dog action is the key. Work them all the way to the boat too, it's not uncommon for fish in these situations to tail a lure and inhale it right at the boat. If you are looking for those bigger run-off fish, up the lure size and be sure that all your terminals are up to the job.

As far as a challenge goes, barra on topwater lures in clear water is up there. You'll see plenty of fish shy away or just watch the lure from only inches away without reaction and these moments can result in some nasty words that are best-not described here but you'll not find too many forms of fishing on this earth more rewarding when it all comes together. 



Don't be afraid to go for big lures with these bucket mouths

***"Not too many fish allow the sort of insight into their feeding patterns as barra do"***



Make sure your hooks are sharp as they'll throw any hook that's not well buried



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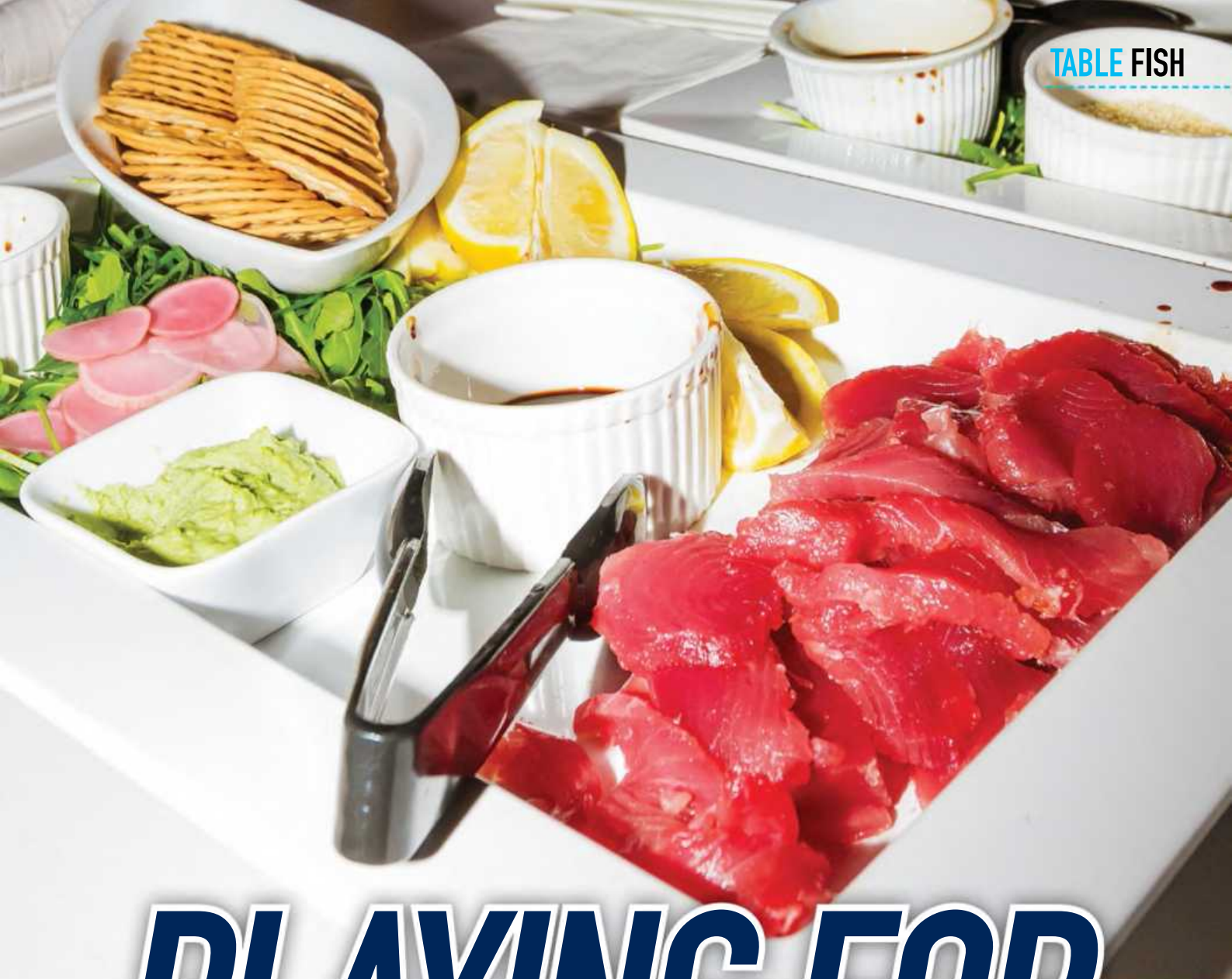


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# ***PLAYING FOR KEEPS***

**There's nothing like keeping a few fish for the table.  
Consider our top tips to keep your fish as fresh as possible**

BY THE MODERN FISHING TEAM



**A**s good as catch and release is, there is something very satisfying to the soul knowing that the fish you eat has come from the end of your own line. In a world where we are becoming increasingly detached from the simple tasks that once sustained us like catching our own food, fishing is still acting as a great

leveller, keeping those who practice it one step closer to our heritage and you have to admit, you love the sense of pride when you bring home the 'bacon'.

If you do decide that you want to take a feed though, do everything you can to ensure that the catch is kept in the best possible condition so that you can experience the best of our Aussie seafood.



Red emperor are regarded as one of the best table fish around so you'll want to look after them if you're lucky enough to get one

## DESPATCH YOUR CATCH

You've caught the fish, you've measured it and determined that it's legal and a good size for a feed. What do you do next? Chuck it in a bucket? Hell no! That stereotypical shot of the bloke fishing on the jetty with a bucket and a writhing fish sitting in there slowly dying and becoming flyblown is simply cringe-worthy and to be honest, unacceptable! If you were to catch a bird or any other animal for that matter and drown

angler can feed the family. Baffling! So please, any fish you decide to keep, despatch them quickly and in a humane manner.

The best ways to do this are by a fish bat to the head or the Japanese technique, Ike Jime. This is not really Japanese, they simply have a name for it and it is essentially inserting a spike straight into the fish's brain which will kill it instantly. Other species such as crustaceans require different methods

***"There is something very satisfying to the soul knowing that the fish you eat has come from the end of your own line"***

it, you'd have the RSPCA breathing down your neck in a flash if someone saw you yet it seems acceptable practice to allow the slow death of a fish that is giving its life so the

such as freezing or spiking but in a different manner to Iki Jime. However you choose to do it, you'll avoid any nasty karma and will have a much nicer flesh by despatching them instantly.

## HANDY TIP

If space is a premium on your boat, a fish chiller bag is the way to go. These come in a range of sizes and can fold down and be stored in a small compartment when they're not in use. They are a great insulator and hold standard ice or a slurry.



Fish Chiller bags have changed the game when it comes to keeping fish and come in a range of sizes to suit most situations





If you need to fillet fish on the sand, use a cutting board as there is nothing worse than that first bite into a piece of fish riddled with sand



## KEEP IT COOL

The obvious move after the fish has been despatched is to store it and your primary concern should be keeping the flesh cool. If you're planning a trip out and you think you'll be keeping a feed, go to the effort of taking a bag or two of ice and an esky and putting the fish in there as soon as you can.

Throwing your whole catch on ice is better than nothing but if you're really serious about getting the most out of it, the best thing you can do is firstly bleed the fish by cutting its throat or cutting through a major artery if you know where this is. On a tuna for example, most people avoid cutting the throat and instead, make a small incision (about 2-3 inches) running from top to bottom, just behind the pectoral fin. This will quickly drain all the fish's blood from the flesh and make for a much better quality of meat. Secondly, remove all the entrails and gills to ensure none of this spoils the meat. Do remember though, it is illegal to fillet or remove a head or tail of the fish on the water. The reason for this is so fisheries can check catches and ensure size limits are adhered to so just stick to gutting the fish.

There's a couple of things that you can do when gutting a fish to ensure an even better quality meat. Firstly, be careful when slicing the fish not to damage any of the entrails as things like bile can seep into the flesh and spoil it. Secondly, and something that not a lot of people do is to brush out the blood line. Use a knife to cut through the surrounding skin at the base of the backbone and slice the whole length of the gut cavity, exposing the bloodline. Then use a brush to remove any of this bloodline.

Now the fish is dressed and ready to go on the ice. From here you can either use straight ice or if you're saltwater fishing, you can make an ice/saltwater slurry. If you want to go with straight ice, make sure you have enough to pack around the fish completely and it helps if you can pack the gut cavity with ice as well. If an ice slurry is the go, you want to achieve -4 degrees. To do this, combine a 1:1 ratio of saltwater and ice and then submerge all of your fish completely in the slurry. This mix will keep at this temperature for quite a long time if it's in a well-sealed cooler so it's great for long days on the water.



Keep as much of the fish covered in ice as possible



## AT THE TABLES

When it comes to the final dressing of a fish to eat, you need to consider if the fish is to be eaten whole or if you want to fillet the meat. If you're keeping the fish whole, do a second check to make sure all the entrails, gills and bits and pieces are removed and also scale the fish. This is the simplest way to clean the fish but can also be the best method.

The second route to take is to fillet the fish. The technique for filleting a fish varies a lot from fish to fish but the simple rule with all fish is to 'waste not, want not'. Enter the knife tight in behind the gills and then make a shallow incision along the back bone and continue all the way to the tail. From here, fold back the flesh that you have cut away and with the sharpest knife you have, carefully cut away the flesh from the frame in long gliding motions with the knife as you keep pulling the flesh further and further away. Take your time as there's nothing worse than seeing that big chunk of meat left hanging on the fish frame because you've rushed into the filleting.



When filleting, work your way slowly along the backbone to ensure you get all the meat off the bone



## TOP TIP


Don't wash your cleaned saltwater fish with fresh water. Keep a bucket of clean saltwater on hand and use this to wash them. Trust us, you'll notice the difference!

## SKIN ON OR OFF?

This is personal preference and is also governed by how you want to cook the fish. Some people enjoy eating the skin so if that's your thing, leave it on but make sure you cook it well. Soggy skin is not very nice but a well-seasoned crispy skin, well that's the goods! Leaving the skin on does protect the flesh of the fish when you're cooking it and it can be removed easily after the fish has been cooked anyway.

## STORING

There's only one way to store fish that are to be kept for any longer than a day. A cryovac machine seals the fish perfectly while removing all the air from around it and when you compare a piece of fish that has been cryovaced to one that has been simply wrapped in Cling Wrap... well, there is no comparison. The only tip with cryovacing though, pat the fish dry with a paper towel before sealing them.

Remember, there's nothing wrong with keeping a feed of fish as long as you're doing it sustainably so don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Follow these simple tips for looking after your catch and you'll appreciate your self-caught seafood so much more! 



Rule number one is to keep your knives sharp and in good condition



The perfect summer feed?  
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Image courtesy of Arnhemland Barramundi Nature Lodge

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# THE GREAT PERCH SEARCH

## Vic angler's license fees at work with a successful 'Search for Perch' event

**T**he annual Victorian perch search was held recently at Nelson on the Glenelg River. A total of twelve handpicked teams were invited comprising of some of the best tournament anglers in Victoria. These anglers worked together collecting estuary perch brood stock for Fisheries. The aim was to catch at least 30 pairs of EPs (30 males and 30 females).

## BACKGROUND

Over the last 4 years Fisheries Victoria has been looking in to the viability of stocking EPs in to inland lakes within the perch's natural range. Rather than netting the brood stock from waterways, fisheries employ the help of anglers to catch them on a hook and line. This actually has a far better survival rate for the fish and

*"It's pretty certain we should have some sporting size perch appearing in stocked dams in the next five years!"*

they can be collected in much better condition. From the brood stock collected by the perch searchers, over 220,000 juvenile perch have been stocked in to 10 water bodies with the hope that they will provide great fishing in the coming years. This is just one of the many great initiatives funded by Victorian recreational fishing license fees. Some of the waters stocked include Lake Bolac, Lake Struan, Devilbend reservoir and Albert Park Lake.

## A SUCCESS!

This year's event was a huge success, with around 200 EPs caught and collected by the anglers. The perch searchers were also asked

to collect a few small mullet to see how they would withstand the collection process. The standout tactic over the weekend was working the snags in two to four metres of water with small soft plastic grubs. Teams spread out on the Friday searching for the best water and found a lot of fish in the upper stretches of the Glenelg. Word got out Friday night and this is where most teams were found during Saturday's fishing. Once all the fish were collected and placed in to the crates they could be graded ready for the plane trip on Sunday.

## HIGH FLYERS


Once the 45 pairs were sorted (45 males and 45 females along with five juvenile mullet), they were boxed up and sent off to the airport for the waiting flight. The perch are then flown up to a private hatchery which is located in Narooma,

NSW. Of the 90 perch that were transported, they only had one mortality which is a really fantastic result. It was great to hear that all of the mullet survived the trip as well. From there, the fish are bred and then sent back to Victoria for stocking. Talk about the VIP treatment!

## GROWTH RATES

Preliminary results from a research team from Deakin University that surveyed six of the stocked waters are showing that EPs from each year of stocking are growing very well. In most cases the stocked fish are actually growing at a faster rate than wild fish in the first twelve months. Interestingly they did a dietary analysis and found that estuary perch will predate on a range of items in the first two years such as shrimps and scud before moving on to a diet of predominately baitfish as they get older. So if you are fishing for large EPs in general, baitfish imitations are definitely the way to go!

## LICENSE FEES AT WORK

It's fantastic to see Fisheries and recreational anglers working together at an event like this. In the coming years it will be exciting to hear of captures of the reared fish that were collected at the events. With the initial growth rate reports, it's pretty certain we should have some sporting size perch appearing in stocked dams in the next five years! 



Perch searchers placing their catch in to the holding crates

One of many EPs collected over the event





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Some form of berley bag secured to a stake or your rod holder (as pictured) is a basic but effective way to go about it



## BEACH BERLEY - THE DIFFERENCE!

**Some form of berley can really spice up a beach session as Shane Murton reports**

**B**each sessions are still some of the most enjoyable fishing I do, and over the years I'd like to think that I'm starting to fish smarter and more efficiently on the sand.

One of the basic, yet so often overlooked, fundamentals to success on the beach is the use of berley, and it can be an absolute game changer. Bringing berley onto the sand with me is part of my beach fishing routine nowadays. Even though long treks on soft beaches aren't pleasant even when lugging a bare minimum of gear, let alone a bunch of berley as well, I'll still make the effort to stuff in all the fish pieces I can as it really is the X-factor that will turn around a sluggish day. I can confidently pinpoint many occasions where its use has resulted in a range of fish being caught.

### BEACH BERLEY TYPES

Like any form of berlying there's a range of characteristics a good beach brew should have, which includes plenty of oil, blood and general smell about it. There's not a lot of rules here, and basically nearly any typical bait species can be part of the mix with pilchards, slimy mackerel, tuna and crabs often use by some fisho's depending on the species targeted.

When we're chasing sharks in the surf it's all about the stink factor, and quite often we'll use whole tuna frames, or large amounts of chopped up fish like mullet, salmon and the like.

When a more slow release berley is in order, tuna or pilchard 'logs' and other frozen berley blocks are a great way to go and work well in conjunction with throwing out chunks. Many of these blocks are slow release and can roll around for a fair while, slowly oozing out smell and releasing small titbits into the water. It's important though not to use frozen berley blocks that may contain the species you're chasing. Some of these can in fact have red fish like snapper and other trawl species in them.

It's not all about flesh baits either. You'll be amazed at what will be drawn in by a simple bread and pellet based berley, which can kick-start an entire food chain of life in your immediate area. With mullet and small salmon swarming in your gutter you can soon start to see the bigger predators snooping around as well. Tuna oil is well worth packing with you too, and can be added to berley mixes or added straight into the water.


### DISTRIBUTING IT

Distributing berley can be as complex as homemade cages staked into the sand in the shore break, to as straightforward as a tin of cat food on a piece of string, or throwing it out by hand.

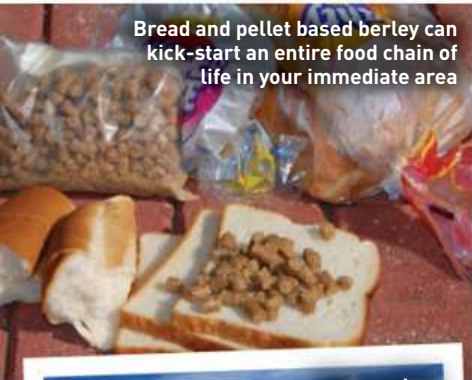
Some form of cage or berley bag is probably the best way to regulate the release of berley in your gutter. Scaling bags, or some type of fine mesh bag like an onion sack, are easily attached to a piece of rope and then secured to a rod holder, or an independent stake in the sand. Berley bags like this are great for fish frames and any other scraps you want to stuff in there and should be placed close enough to the water so they're being moved around by wave action. Further to this you should regularly 'stoke' up the bag by treading on it or giving it a good shake to ensure it's still releasing material into the water. Alternatives to this are a variety of homemade cages made out of chicken wire or plastic, or commercially available versions.

Throwing out berley by hand is a favourite of mine to ensure it finds its way to deeper water quick and isn't eaten by birds in the shallows or washed back on the beach. Oftentimes if you can get your berley past the inshore slop it will find its way to deeper water and settle in the gutter you're fishing. So many times we've broadcast fish pieces by hand only to find them in the gut contents of the fish we've caught.

Some anglers also like to dig a shallow hole and actually bury berley like pilchard pieces, so it's released by wave action and seeps through the sand. Ultimately no matter how you do it, as long as it's going in the water regularly and is reaching the water you're fishing it'll be doing its job and holding and attracting fish.

There's very few fish which won't respond to berley on the beach, from salmon through to jewies, sharks and more. While it can be a pain in the bum carrying the extra weight around with you, if you work hard to maintain a steady trail and know when to berley hard and when to back it off, you'll reap some impressive results on the beach and be converted for life! 

Bread and pellet based berley can kick-start an entire food chain of life in your immediate area



It's amazing what a bit of berley can do! This big red was tempted in close with a steady berley trail



Burying berley in the sand can be a way to slowly release it if you don't have a berley bag



A bronze whaler tempted close to shore with berley





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Loading the rod well is the key to a good cast

# MASTER THE CAST

Consider these tips to improve your casting tenfold

**T**here's not a whole lot you can do to improve your fishing if you haven't got the basics down and casting is the bare fundamental of fishing. Casting can be as simple as flicking a bait out as far as your ability and gear allows or you can take it to a new level by mastering the small things to perfect your techniques for the ultimate in accuracy and distance.

## CASTING STYLES

There's more than one way to skin a cat just as there's more than way to cast a lure or bait and understanding when to use what style will kick start the learning curve. Here's four that should pretty much get you through any situation if you can get them down pat.

your rod and most of the propulsion of the lure or bait comes from the tip of the rod and a downward motion of the wrist.

4. Lastly, the skim cast – this is where your skills really get honed. It's a tough cast so get the basics of the other casts down first before you concentrate on this one. This can be done with a quality baitcaster with a loose spool or spin gear and the idea of this is to get accurate casts in to structure but under overhangs. Think of it as skimming a rock only you're doing it with your lure. The cast is usually aimed to make contact with the water at a point just under the overhang but the angle needs to be very slight and you need a fair bit of propulsion so the lure hits the surface and keeps skimming under the overhang to the position you want it in.

## “Casting is the bare fundamental of fishing”

1. There's the standard overhead cast which can be done with spin or overhead gear - the aim is to load your rod right up and propel your bait or lure as far as you can. This is grass roots and the best place to start to learn to cast. This is a technique for open water as accuracy goes out the window with this one.
2. Next is the parallel cast which is commonly used with a baitcaster for accuracy. Perfect for flicking the snags or other structures where you need to get your lure in tight. With this cast, you're looking for less lob (but still a bit) by angling the rod parallel to the water's surface so you're casting from one side of your body.
3. To get this sort of accuracy with spin gear, you'll be looking at an overhead cast but with only a vertical extension (or slightly more) of


## LOADING

Learning how to load your rod properly and get the feel for when to release for the distance you need only comes from experience so the best thing you can do is get out on the water and practice hard. If you can't get on the water, set up a target in the back yard and move it around for different lengths. This is a great way to get your accuracy on point.

## RODS

While getting the load and offload right is the key to a good cast, you won't be able to do this well at all if you're using the wrong gear. It's really important that the rod you're using is matched to the offering you're throwing around. A lot of people tend to match a casting rod to the fish they're chasing but this shouldn't be the first point to consider. A far more important consideration is the weight of your lure and your ability to make long, short and accurate casts with the rod. You can worry about fighting the fish later but getting the hook-up should be the first thought.

Rods don't need to break the bank but try to go for a reputable brand and do your research on what you should be looking for. Talk to the guys in the tackle shop and don't be afraid to spend some time with the rod in the shop before you buy.

Mastering the cast is the first step you can take to becoming a better angler so it's well worth your time to get it right. 

While loading measures distance, the release and follow through gets you accuracy



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A juvenile black marlin with a load of uninvited hitch-hikers. Flatworms on the side of the head and some copepods on the undersurface towards the tail



## WAR OF NUTRITION

**Ever wondered why marlin are often riddled with parasites and if they affect the fish?**

**M**ost wild fish have parasites – lots of them. It's just that we don't see them very often because they are either internal or very small. You don't need a microscope though to be able to see some external parasites of marlin. Because of my interest in billfish, I often receive photos from anglers showing such external parasites, especially on juvenile black marlin. The usual questions are: What exactly are these parasites and do they affect the fish's overall survival rate?

The two types of parasites shown in the accompanying photos are the 'usual suspects' commonly found on marlin, but biologically they are worlds apart. The round pinkish one is a species of flatworm – a veritable giant of the flatworms known as *Tristomella pricei*. Technically, these are monogenic flatworms, meaning that they complete their life cycle on a single host animal, rather than needing intermediate hosts. They are related to tapeworms and flukes and also the creepy worms found in the stomachs of pretty well every wahoo that swims (but that's another story). These giants, though, have evolved as external parasites that eat body slime and also suck blood. Often competing with the flatworms on the same fish is another external parasite, the little purple/pink marlin 'fleas' or 'lice' also pictured. These ones are copepods, a type of crustacean that skitter freely around the body, and like the flatworms, also eat blood and body slime.

For both of these parasites, the surface of their host marlin is their entire world – a veritable small planet cruising around the world's oceans, mostly at a leisurely pace, but every now and then, at underwater speeds which are truly mind blowing. Add to this their host's predisposition to purposely jump through the interface between water and air, and crash back down with enormous force and you have a rather precarious environment in which evolution has placed you. Now if you are a copepod, you can move about this living planet quite easily. However, if

you are a flatworm, movement is not so easy, and you would tend to stay in the one area, preferably an area of low turbulence. Because both parasites eat the same food, it is theorised that the less mobile flatworms may exude a toxin that keeps the copepods away from their patch. Certainly, the distribution of both animals on the surface of a marlin suggests this, and preliminary field studies show that the worms indeed produce a chemical that harms the crustaceans. Biological warfare on a fish-sized planet.

Parasites need their hosts, that is obvious. Without their hosts, they would simply not have anywhere to live. But parasites, by definition, are harmful to their hosts. Therefore, the problem for any parasite is not to overload a given host to the point of death. The two types of external, mobile parasites shown here would most likely never be in sufficient numbers to cause life-threatening problems for their host, although they clearly do cause localised abrasion and inflammation when in large numbers. But whether or not marlin 'free jump' to try to rid themselves of parasites is unknown. One of those questions we can never answer without actually asking the fish.

There is, however, another type of more specialized external parasite of marlin which can cause debilitation and possibly death. This is a long 'worm' often seen growing from the backs of marlin. In fact, these are not worms, but highly modified copepods with wicked anchor-like jaws which, once they have taken hold, are destined to remain in the one spot sucking blood throughout their lives. Normally only a few of these parasites will find and infect a single fish, but occasionally, an unfortunate marlin may play host to dozens, or even hundreds of these gruesome creatures. In such cases, the host fish will be definitely in poor condition due to the numbers of its unwelcome blood-sucking hitch-hikers.

We don't yet know enough about the life cycles of either the copepod or the flatworm to be sure how they find and attach themselves to a marlin. However, it's a fair bet that both must find their host when they (the parasites) are tiny free-swimming larvae. Both are fairly specific about what species of fish they can live on, so presumably, chemical cues alert the larvae to the proximity of an appropriate host as it swims by. In the ways of nature, millions upon millions must die without ever hitching the ride of their lives, but for the ones that do, it must be the parasite version of winning the great lottery of life. MF

Heavy infestation of marlin 'lice' – mobile copepod parasites that eat body slime and blood of their host



Closeup showing the giant marlin flatworm. Some abrasion and inflammation caused by the parasites can be clearly seen





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Weighing just 11kg, and only 167cm long when packed up in the carry bag, it's been designed to easily fit in or on your vehicle for a quick set-up on the go.

The Screen House retails at \$369 with optional walls at \$24.95ea and a mesh floor at \$99. 



The Screen House packs away neatly to avoid taking up valuable space



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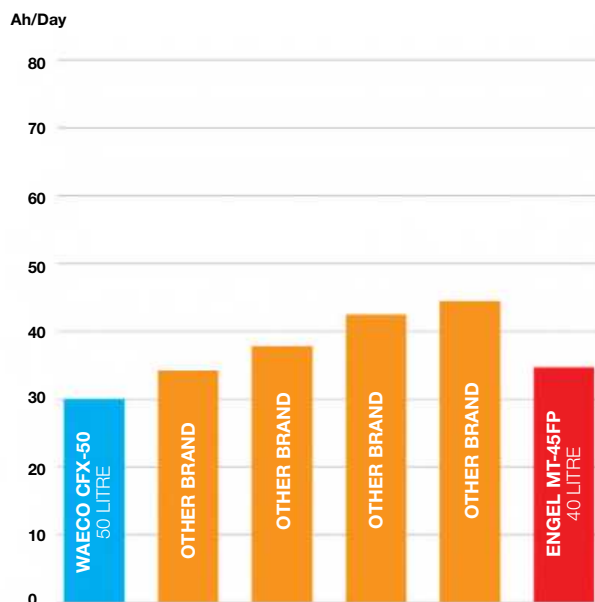


# Correction Notice

Waeco has recently published comparative advertising material which stated that the Engel 40L fridge/freezer (MT45FP) consumed power at the rate of 80 amp hours per day which was converted from a result of 956 watt hours per day published in Australian 4WD Action Issue #228.

Waeco has since been advised by Vipac Engineers and Scientists Limited, the laboratory that conducted the independent testing, that this result was incorrect, as the Engel 40L fridge/freezer only used 34.42 amp hours per day.

Waeco apologizes unreservedly for publishing the incorrect information and notes that the graph as printed in our advertising material ought to have appeared as follows:



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# THE GOODS!

Here's a sneak peek at the latest gear to hit the shelves

## SHIMANO TWINPOWER SW

Hagane Body and Hagane Gears, an increased number of bearings and heavy drag capabilities have made the Twin Power spin reels must-haves for the elite saltwater angler.

The TwinPower Saltwater series make use of three key engineering developments from Shimano. The all-metal Hagane Body offers high rigidity and impact resistance and has all but eliminated body flexing. This means the angler gets more cranking power under load. This is backed up by the increased efficiency of the cold-forged Hagane Gears for increased resilience and durability, with reduced wearing during the life of the reel. Of course there's X-Ship, where the pinion gear is supported on both ends by SA-RB bearings for smoother operation whilst under the load of a big fish.

An additional ten SA-RB bearings and a roller bearing mean that the winding experience is exquisitely smooth, no matter how big the fish or how high the drag setting.

These versatile saltwater class threadlines are accomplished snapper, kingfish and tuna reels, whether you float Squidgies down a berley trail, hurl stickbaits at surface-feeders, or jig in deep water. They have the gear ratios to go the distance, and the line capacities for that unexpected monster, especially when spooled with fine diameter Power Pro braid. The use of braid is backed up by incredible drag power — a massive 11 kilos in the 4000SWBXG, through to 25 kilos on the 14000SWBXG.

For more info, visit  
[www.shimanofish.com.au](http://www.shimanofish.com.au)



## NORIES IN THE BAIT

There are 2 exciting new colours joining the In The Baits 12g range; colour BR-312 Black body with a black blade and BR-313 silver fleck body with a silver blade.

IN THE BAITS like all Nories products have been designed and tested to not only catch lots of fish but cast well. The body and blade designs help the blade spin away from the line during free fall to reduce the possibility of line tangles. In turn you pick up a lot more bites on the free-fall!

IN THE BAITS are ideal for fishing flats and deep areas where fish are schooled up. They are able to be used with a variety of techniques such "lift and fall" or simply retrieved at a constant pace once it has touched the bottom. They are also perfect for



buzzing the tops of weed or bush with a constant pace retrieve. As well as Fishing banks and structure with the main "lift and fall" retrieve proves to be deadly as well.

Check out the website for the new colours: [www.jml.net.au](http://www.jml.net.au)



# VAN STAAL VR

Van Staal's new-release VR series offers the famous Van Staal features—including all seven seals that keep the reel completely sealed and waterproof—at a mid-level price point. This is great news for kayak, beach and hard-core anglers seeking the most durable spin reel with the best protection against saltwater and sand intrusion.

The new Van Staal VR reels have seals positioned throughout the spool, body and handle assembly. The patented drag system is a stack of six carbon fibre and six stainless steel washers and it is also sealed and waterproof, making the VR reels literally submersible—which in practical terms means far less maintenance and better durability for fishing conditions such as kayak and beach scenarios where your reel takes on waves or is otherwise in regular contact with saltwater and sand.

The VR Series reels also feature Van Staal's new braid-optimised oscillating system that delivers the perfect line lay every time, for increased casting distance, control and line capacity. Other VR Series features include: a massive main gear that is spiral-bevelled, as is the pinion gear; a 4.8:1 gear ratio; aluminium handle with Delrin ball-style knob; a titanium-nitride coated main shaft; the body is fully machined from 6061-T6 aluminium; and each reel comes with parts and a tool for easy maintenance and conversion from a bailed reel to manual pick-up.

The VR series is also modular, with the one body used for all four spool sizes—125, 150, 175 and 200—with two rotor sizes used for this spread, so you can have one reel with spares to cover multiple tasks. The braid line capacities range from 400yd of 20lb in the VR125 up to the VR200's capacity of 500yd of 40lb.



**If your fishing environment destroys anything but a fully-machined, over-engineered, truly sealed and waterproof reel, then the low maintenance and durability of the Van Staal VR Series is what you need. Only one reel is tougher—it's also a Van Staal.**

## HYBRID GLISS

GLISS KG line from German tackle company WFT has the slickness of mono, thinner diameters and better strength than braid, plus better casting performance than both. You might never fish with traditional braid or mono again.

GLISS KG is a third-generation line that, like top quality braids, is made from 100 percent Japanese PE fibres. However, where GLISS KG differs is that it is not braided, it is instead extruded into an almost perfectly round shape and uses different material treatments and coating processes developed to combine the best traits of mono and braid into one ultra-performance line that, among other attributes, will certainly improve your casting distance.

The slick and smooth outer coating of GLISS KG resembles monofilament and because the PE fibres are compressed much more during GLISS KG production

than in braid manufacturing, it achieves a thinner line with a much higher breaking strain at the same denier rating. GLISS KG also retains its round shape during a fish fight or retrieval much better than braid, which flattens considerably as braid passes through your top guide, which in turn affects your next cast.

GLISS KG has less stretch—at around 2 percent—than any braided PE line, yet it retains the braid-like flexibility with no memory, has extremely low diameter-to-line-class ratios and provides excellent sensitivity.

Other GLISS KG attributes include a very high dimensional stability and low water absorption, so it will pack neatly onto your spool, producing a perfect winding contour after each cast. This combines with the smooth coating, line flexibility and thin diameter to deliver performance-enhanced casting distance—



which actually improves even further when wet. Other advantages include exceptional UV resistance, extreme tensile strength, impressive abrasion resistance and a highly colourfast finish.

**Check out the website for the new colours: [www.jml.net.au](http://www.jml.net.au)**



# ROVEX SPECIALIST EGi SQUID WRANGLER

The new Rovex Specialist EGi Squid Wrangler rods are a must-have for squid fishing enthusiasts who enjoy calamari dinners and fishing premium live baits. Choose from either the 7'6" or 8'6", both rated for squid jig sizes 1.5 to 4.0. The Specialist Squid Wranglers are built on a modern high-modulus graphite blank fitted with oval silicon guides, to help avoid light-braid-line tangles on windy days.

A jig hook-keeper is fitted for convenience and the stylish cosmetics and split-rear-grip design looks great while keeping weight to a minimum. Both models are two-piece and it's a nice bonus that this format also performs as a handy land-based soft plastic lure rod to cast from your local beaches.

The parabolic rod blank actions are inspired by the latest Japanese technology and each Specialist EGi Squid Wrangler is built to absorb the pulsing movements of a squid working to get away, helping to keep your catch connected to your squid jig pins until within netting range.

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Unlike other slug-style plastics, the HeroZ is 10X Tough to stand up to brutal strikes and hard fought battles, making it a go-to when chasing toothies or fishing through schools of toothy species to access fish holding deeper. Whether it's kingfish, tuna, mackerel, cobia, trevally and other pelagic species or fishing deep for snapper, dhufish, coral trout and other reefies, the 10" HeroZ is sure to attract their attention and entice the bite.

HeroZ are available in 6 colours, with 3 per pack and a SRP of \$27.95.

Check out the website: [www.z-man.com.au](http://www.z-man.com.au)



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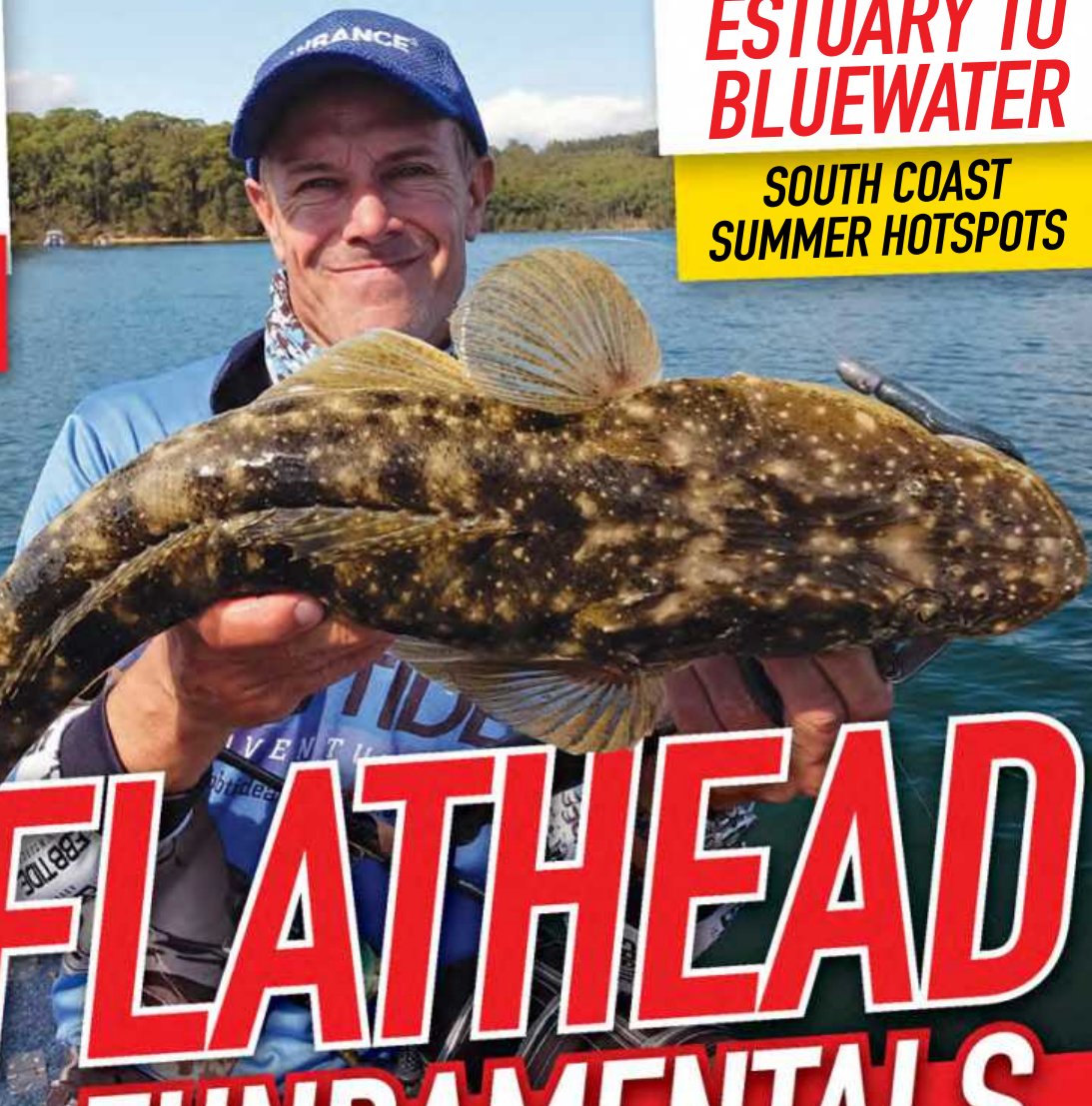
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A photograph of two fishing lures hanging from a clothesline. The lure on the left is red and yellow, and the one on the right is silver and purple. They are both attached to red clothespins. In the background, there is a clothesline with various items of laundry, including a blue shirt, a purple shirt, and a black hat, hanging against a backdrop of green foliage. The text "They shrank in the wash." is overlaid on the right side of the image.

They shrank  
in the wash.

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